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1800

In the Schillingscourt

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY EMILY R. STEINESTEL.

NEW YORK:
GEORGE MUNRO'S SONS, PUBLISHERS,
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET.

IN THE SCHILLINGSCOURT.

CHAPTER I.

"SCHILLINGSCOURT" was the name of that grand old house near the Benedictine Church, but it always had been, and continued to be, designated as the "Column House," notwithstanding modern times had adorned whole street-fronts with great and small "columns," thus robbing the house of its distinguishing peculiarity.

It had been built by a Benedictine monk. In those days—before harboring strangers had become a municipal business—travelers found shelter within the hospitable gates of cloisters and knightly castles along their way. Some monastic orders erected especial accommodations upon their property for this purpose, and thus the Column House originated.

It had been a very wealthy monastic society, and Brother Ambrosius, the architect and sculptor, had come from Italy, enraptured with the beautiful plans that were to become a monument to his genius as a lodgment suitable to the rank of the princely personages who were in the habit of knocking at the cloister gates when traveling through this part of the country with family and retinue.

This is how there happened to loom up beside the homely gable house occupied by the monks this most elegant façade, with its broad-columned hall-way, that supported a second story, with great bow-windows and arched cornices and consoles that were beautifully carved. The columns of the immense arched door in the vestibule also displayed marvelously executed designs in flowers and fruit artistically carved in the stone.

The first-floor, with its pillared corridors, extended the depth of three windows beyond the second story, thus forming a communication with the southern wall of the monastery proper, and forming a charming terrace on either side of the columned hall, inclosed by stone balustrades, from which a number of doors led to the floor above.

The nineteenth century can guess but little of the experi-

ences of this foreigner on German ground during those depressed times. The monastery then stood upon a common, along the road-way of which only a few mud huts were scattered, whose inhabitants scarcely ventured to peer out of their wooden window-shutters at night when they heard tramping of horses and imperious voices in the vicinity of the cloister.

The red light of glaring torches rising above the high walls, the infernal noise of yelping and baying dogs, and swearing troopers, with their neighing, stamping steeds, seemed like a scene from Hades; but it was hushed as suddenly as an outburst of hobgoblin frenzy, and the hutters crept enviously back to their beds. They knew that delicious wines flowed night and day within those now dark walls for those fine ladies and gentlemen.

And behind those tapestry-draped windows flickered great wax candles in massive chandeliers, and high-born men and women, disembarrassed of riding-habits and wraps, gathered about the richly laden, long, oaken table, set with the abbot's splendid silverware, and bumpers foamed and wit flowed. And away into the small hours the dice rattled; and the itinerant players, who had been lodged on straw upon the stone flags of the monastery for the night, were permitted to come over and sing and play as long as fingers and throats held out.

They came often, and from various directions, these high and titled gentlemen, to hold secret conclave under the monastic protection of the Column House, and many of the most important documents of the time were concocted and had their origin in the Benedictine Cloister. And the monks, by the way, lost nothing thereby. Without ever being present, they yet, by a species of fine penetration, together with their shrewd combinative powers, were enabled to follow the movements of their guests, and judged the nature of these secret meetings; and this made them appear possessed of miraculous knowledge which played into their hands an influence incalculable.

Later—at the end of the Reformation—the monks migrated. The Column House and the greater portion of wood, field, and meadow-land became the property of the Schillings, and the rest, the monastery inclusive, with its out-buildings, passed into the possession of cloth-weaver Wolfram. The Schillings took down the wall fronting the street and transferred it to the dividing line between their own and the Wolfram ground; for such a thing as neighborly intercourse was not to be thought of at that time. The clay huts disappeared; the busy spirit of the city burst its limiting walls, and new streets led into fields like grasping claws, and before the expiration of another

century the Column House lay in the center of a fine, well-populated city quarter, like some rare lady-bug webbed in the net of an active spider.

The gentlemen of Schilling had progressed with the spirit of the times. The old wall had been substituted by a handsome iron fence, light and transparent as Brabantine lace-work; the large plain grass-plot it once inclosed was cut up into flower-beds, divided by paths strewn with colored sand. In front of the columned hall was an immense statue fountain, surrounded by a number of ornamental shade-trees. The cloth-weaving family adjoining were decidedly more conservative; they neither tore down nor built up; they merely took care of things; and wherever a stone began to totter, it was mortared on again with most anxious solicitude; and thus, after nearly three hundred years, the "Cloister estate," as it was called, presented pretty much the same physiognomy given it by the monks.

Dark with age, its heavy beams looking crooked and sunken, the gable house rose homely and grim as ever above the shabby inclosure, that was simply a mass of patch-work, and keeping it company was the frame of the great arched gate and the little portal alongside of the main entrance, where once the weary traveler came to crave admittance: that rattled and creaked then, as it does now, when at six o'clock in the evening the people came swarming from all sides to get milk at the Wolframs, as people used to in the old, old days in the cloth-weaver's time—for the Wolframs had soon deserted the loom and turned their attention to farming, increasing their possessions slowly, as long as pasturage and land could be purchased. They scraped and saved, and they were all headstrong characters, successively. The men were not afraid of the plow; and the women, one after another, stood punctually at the milk-table to guard against the possibility of a penny being lost through careless or dishonest domestics.

They did perfectly right, these Wolframs, as the course of time proved. Their wealth increased, and, consequently, their importance; they were, almost without exception, elected to the city council; and at last, after another century, came the hour when the Lords of Schilling condescended to observe that they had a neighbor. A friendly intercourse then developed. To be sure, the high wall remained standing. A splendid grape-vine had crept over it from Schillingscourt, and mingled its tough fibers with a hardy, dark old ivy from the other side. But the spirit of a civilized era surmounted such barriers to sociability, and the Schillings

no longer considered it beneath their dignity to hold an infant Wolfram over the baptismal font, and when the senator received an invitation to dine at Schillingscourt, it did not occur to him that he ought to feel particularly honored. Indeed, the mutations of the last century were pressing the changes perceptibly upon both races; while the once despised cloth-wearing plebeian surrounded himself with the patrician nimbus reflected from his full coffers and vast estates, the treasury of the Schillings became shockingly impoverished; they had lived in luxury, and entertained generously; and the last senior of the family, Baron Krafft von Schilling, was trembling upon the brink of ruin, when the relative, to whom all his possessions were mortgaged, died. This was the salvation of the sinking race—the only son of Baron Schilling married the daughter of the deceased, and with it all their former wealth. This occurred in 1860. In this fortunate year a circumstance also happened in the Wolfram establishment that occasioned extraordinary rejoicing. For several generations there had been but one representative Wolfram; and for fifty years no male heir had been born on the Cloister estate, and, in consequence, the last of the family—senator and mayor of the city—Franz Wolfram, had become a morose and taciturn husband, who seemed to nurse his disappointment and hold his wife accountable for it.

Five daughters came seeking the light of day in the Cloister, all "abominable tow-heads, like their mother," and all inclined to fear and creep out of sight of the stern father, until their brief existence ended, and the blonde little curly heads were permitted a peaceful rest upon the pillow for the dead.

Mrs. Senator Wolfram attended to her duties in a shrinkingly silent manner, like a conscious culprit before the scowling master. Only at the unexpected sound of his footsteps did her pale face flush as if with fright; otherwise she was like some uncomplaining but active statue.

And now, seven years after the death of her last little daughter, she rested once more under the great white canopy of the bed in the back room upstairs. Without, heavy black clouds darkened the sky, but in the room one magic flash of light illuminated the sad face of the sufferer—

"A son!" was the grand announcement.

"A Wolfram!" was the senator's victorious exclamation. He cast two gold pieces into the bath-tub, where the nurse held the little, brown-skinned, quivering heir, then going to the bed he bent over his wife, and for the first time in twenty

years kissed the hand of the woman who had at last done her duty, and given him a son.

And what a jubilee followed! The people on the Cloister estate had never witnessed such a time before. The Wolframs were not a family to make a display of their vast wealth. On the contrary, they made it a point to keep their family treasures of household linen and silver hidden from sight. The knowledge of possession was sufficient for them.

But on this day there was spread in the "big room," formerly the monk's refectory, all the splendor, denied to the public eyes, of the Wolfram estate. On the immense damask-covered table glittered the silver-ware that had been stowed away for centuries — plates, cups, saucers, slender goblets, bowls, great salt-cellars, and massive table-ware of every description. Around the dark, carved, wooden walls were placed elegant many-armed silver candlesticks; all were of rare workmanship and beautiful design. In the adjoining room stood the christening-table. The Wolframs had never affected a fondness for flowers. Their window-sills displayed neither pot, plant nor vine; but to-day a superb orangery from the city florist's decorated the baptismal apartment, and the little candidate of honor was robed in the christening heirloom, a long dress of heavy, pale-green satin; on the little black crowned head was the old-fashioned cap belonging to the suit, trimmed with yellow mechlin lace and embroidered with seed pearls.

In the meantime the old nurse sat upstairs and enlarged to the senator's wife upon the grand doings below; told how proudly, in satin and silks, the sponsors were arrayed—of the wines, whose savory spices penetrated the whole house, that were being consumed, while the senator's son lay like a little prince amid the fragrant blossoms around the baptismal table.

A bitter, sad smile hovered about the sick woman's mouth—her girl babies had not worn that magnificent dress. It was intended by the Wolfram ancestor for the male descendants only. No flowers covered their christening-table; the silver treasures of the family remained in their leathern covers. But roses began to bloom on those pale cheeks—dark-red roses—and while down-stairs goblets were emptied to the prosperity and welfare of the so fervently longed-for perpetuator of the Wolframs, the white curtains around that bed upstairs parted, and five babes crept in. They were all with their mother, the five little girls, and she caressed and covered them with passionate kisses day and night, this happy mother heart; and the physicians stood around the whispering woman, until, with a

sweetly weary sigh, she turned her face away from them and went to sleep forever.

Her departure left no remarkable vacancy. Baby had a nurse, and a few hours after her death the senator's sister, a beautiful, serious-faced woman, came down from her apartments on the top floor, and undertook the management of the widower's household.

She was a thorough Wolfram in character and appearance, that gave no indication of the forty-six years of her life. Only once had she experienced emotion enough to conquer the principles of her education, and the consequences were not the happiest. She was joint inheritor of the Wolfram possessions, and a very handsome girl. She had been petted at Schillingscourt like an own daughter. 'Twas there she had made the acquaintance of Major Lucian of Königsberg, and eventually married him, notwithstanding her brother's admonitions and the warnings of her own heart; and in truth they were about as well adapted to each other as water and fire. She, with her traditionally positive Wolfram nature; he, the elegant, merry-souled officer. She had determined to make him submissive to her way of life, and he had escaped the circumscribing trammels wherever it was possible with disdaining ridicule. This naturally resulted in domestic conflicts; so one evening, with her five-year-old son, she left Königsberg secretly and came back to the Cloister estate to remain permanently.

Little Felix had buried his face in the folds of her traveling-cloak when she led him through the halls of her ancestral house: the stairs, leading into the forsaken silence of the upper floor, with their strangely carved banister and creaky, foot-worn steps; the deep arched door-way, in which perpetual shadows had gathered; the great lusterless window-panes set in their leaden holds, against which the bats fluttered at night, and through which the sunlight fell yellow and dull as oil upon the chinks in the floor of the front room—all this was as frightful to the child as the "man-eater's house in the forest." And the senator remarked, with enviously hateful glances at the little finely built, handsome boy, in his blue velvet suit, so becoming to the glossy golden curls falling upon his shoulders, that his sister had brought a gayly plumed humming-bird into the "hawk's nest."

And an alien the little abducted fellow remained. The chilling atmosphere of his Cloister home could not drive the ideal pictures out of head and soul. He was a poetical, warm-hearted being like his father. The deserted man in Königsberg had made every endeavor to gain possession of his boy,

but his claims were referred to the judiciary judgment of Senator Wolfram—the mother retained possession of the child, and Major Lucian disappeared from Königsberg, and no one knew whither he had gone.

Mrs. Lucian took up her abode in the gable room fronting the street, that she had occupied in her girlhood. She fitted body and soul between the plainly painted walls, in which were built deep closets, with great, brown-stained, swinging doors. She sat, as of yore, in the unyielding high-backed leather-covered chair in the window embrasure. She slept behind the heavy curtains, in the adjoining room, that had been woven by her grandmother's own hands. But she never entered Schillingscourt again. She put away everything that could remind her of her deserted husband, and fled recollections like a murderous fiend; but little Felix soon became perfectly at home there; the only son of Baron Krafft von Schilling was about the same age, and they became playmates and companions, with the approval of Mrs. Lucian—with the condition that the child should in no manner be reminded of his father. Later, the lads attended the same college, and studied law together. Arnold von Schilling looked forward to a brilliant career as jurist. Felix Lucian was to follow closely in the footsteps of his uncle—first to hold some public office, then settle down on the Cloister estate; for, since the death of the last little blonde-haired daughter, the senator intended making Felix his heir, with the proviso that he renounce his father's name and adopt that of Wolfram.

Then came the changes of 1860, as already stated. Arnold von Schilling came home in response to the pleading of a father, who, in his declining health, hoped to restore the Schillings's prosperity by wedding his son to the cousin, and mortgage-holder of the estate. But the tardy arrival of Guy Wolfram, with his delicate constitution, upset Felix Lucian's prospects decidedly.

CHAPTER II.

THE senator's wife was buried in the family burying-ground one snowy April morning, and Felix Lucian came home long enough to pay the last respects to his aunt, and returned immediately after the funeral.

But two months later, when the June air was laden with sweet fragrance, and the ground was white with falling blossoms, he came back for "a few days' recreation," as he had written to his mother.

It seemed to him, as he entered the broad hall where the ceremonies over the dead had taken place, that he could still perceive the blue incense railing the ceiling, and that the place was permeated with the spicy odor from the box-tree garlands, in which the slender, fair-haired woman reposed so quietly. But it was only minute particles of dust reflected in the light upon the ceiling, and through the open doors came the appetizing smell of fowls roasting in the kitchen ovens. His mother stood by the milk-dresser counting eggs into the basket of a domestic, who, according to a weekly habit, carried freshly churned butter and eggs to favorite customers in the city. One moment only her eyes lighted with undisguised motherly pride, as the tall, fine-looking youth advanced toward her; but there were five eggs in each hand, so she carefully turned her face over her shoulder for him to kiss a cheek, and remarked, with anxious haste: "Go upstairs, Felix, until I'm through."

The arms he had flung impulsively around her fell at his side, and he hurried out of the room. In the family apartment, the Wolfram heir was crying lustily—this young personage screamed shrill and hateful as a cat. Out in the barnyard the hens were cackling and roosters crowing. On the second-floor, the sleek old mouser came gliding toward him from the garret-floor, where he had been on a hunting expedition among the corn stored there, and paused to curl himself cozily around the young man's feet, who sent him ungraciously to the right-about, as the attacked members stamped the floor with a violence as if they were shaking off snow.

The windows of his mother's room were open, but the soft spring air that came in was not burdened with the delicious perfume that filled the apartment: this came from one of the deep closets that stood open, displaying the shelves gleaming with closely piled linen, between the silvery white folds of which thousands of violets were perishing. During his boyhood his eyes had never been blessed with the sight of a pot or glass of the sweet blossoms, standing on table or anywhere about. "It would get upset, or be in the way," he was told, when he wished to fashion a bouquet, while plucking them, to be buried among the linen treasures—how he hated these white layers of the stuff to which his mother always devoted so much time and care; he cast a scowling glance at them in passing.

Mrs. Lucian had evidently been interrupted in looking over her register. There upon the square legged oaken table in the window lay the book he recollected so well, with its innumerable entries; but the page open before him contained a record he had never seen before.

"Apportionment of house-linen for my son Felix," was written at the head of the page. He blushed like a girl as he read the entry of his own future household possessions—dozens of sheets, towels, spreads, bed and pillow-cases were noted as importantly as if his domestic happiness depended entirely upon them, and this stupidly serious array of figures was to be engrafted into the merriest, wildest little curly head ever resting upon maiden shoulders? "Oh, Lucille, how you would laugh!" he murmured, smiling at the very idea.

Mechanically he ran the pages through his fingers. Here were thousands upon thousands marked "Rent income." What immense wealth, and still this everlasting scraping and saving and anxiety in regard to the penny that might be lost with the breakage of an egg! He pushed the book from him with disgust, and running his hands impatiently through his splendid locks of blonde hair, he walked to the window.

His elegant presence, and naturally aristocratic manners and the delicately perfumed clothes, distinguished him as much the alien to-day in this "hawk's nest," as the dainty kid gloves were out of place upon the clumsy table upon which they had been carelessly thrown, or those polished boots upon that coarse, bare floor.

He pressed his brow against the window and gazed out. Like some recluse, the Cloister estate lay buried among the handsome residences about it. On the other side of the old wall was the street promenade, lined with blooming chestnut-trees. He felt ashamed to think the fashionable world passed by the wretchedly patched inclosure; he was humiliated to think that from the bronze-railed balcony of the castle-like house opposite, the people could look into the yard between the Cloister House and the wall. To be sure, the four great linden-trees, with rich young foliage, distorted by not one dead limb, stood in the center; but the ancient stone seat, and the mottled old rocks around the natural spring they shaded, were ornamenetd with a lot of freshly scoured milk-pans. And what a farm-yard racket! A load of new clover was just entering the gate; the driver was beating his horses and swearing at the narrowness of the passageway. A barefooted dairy-maid was scolding and driving a couple of obstinate calves out of the front yard into their proper quarters, from which they had escaped. Swarms of pigeons fluttered up in affright, and there was a general screeching and scattering among the poultry.

"Bah! Boorish farming!" Felix exclaimed between his

teeth, turning his offended sight away, until it rested upon the lovely parterres of Schillingscourt.

With a deep-drawn breath of satisfaction he viewed the place that had always seemed more like home to him than the Cloister estate. He could only see part of the lawn mirror—from the center of which the fountain sprung—above the ivy-covered wall, and he could not catch sight of all the plate-glass window-panes, set in their arched and ornamented frames, but he had a full view of the three rows of magnificent sycamore-trees forming a double avenue into the garden proper, on the south side of Schillingscourt; that shady retreat was the play-ground where, in company of his little friend Arnold, many happy days had been passed. The cool avenue had frequently served as salon on hot summer afternoons. Here the baron received company, indulged in his siesta, and then drank his afternoon coffee. He saw the coffee-pot on the table now—not the old brass dripper he recollected so well—that had given place to a silver one. There was an unusual smount of silver-ware among the dishes, he noticed, and also several cut-glass decanters sparkling with liqueurs. The table was not set thus in former days, when they sat about it on rustic benches painted white. To-day there was a lot of handsome cast-iron furniture standing among the trees; gayly colored silken pillows invited rest; handsomely decorated screens were suggestive of *tête-à-tête* protected from draughts.

But the strangest appearance there was the lady who at this moment came out of the house and began walking up and down the avenue, evidently waiting for some one. Arnold had no sister, and he had been motherless since early youth; and since Felix could remember the good-natured fleshy housekeeper had been the only female element represented in the place, and this was a long trail of glistening blue silk moving about in the shaded avenue. After twenty years a woman's spirit and a woman's will ruled on an equality with the old baron at Schillingscourt again.

Two months previous, while Felix was attending his aunt's funeral, his friend Arnold's marriage had taken place in Coblentz, and he had simply and curtly announced that he was married to "that tall girl," his Coblentz cousin; and this was the new mistress of Schillingscourt. An unusually tall figure, narrow-chested, flat-breasted, and inclined to stoop, like most tall persons; but certainly aristocratic in bearing, and a well-bred lady in every indolent movement. He could not see her face fully; but the profile seemed to him sharp and long-drawn, English type, and extremely pale, with a wealth of

pale yellow hair that protested at the use of hair-pins, as if they were painful to the young head. She glanced frequently, with a touch of impatience, toward the windows and door, and moved the cups and cake-baskets again and again, in a nervous manner.

Then a young girl, wearing a bodiced apron, came out of the house and placed a shawl about the shoulders of the lady, and put gloves upon her hands. Like an automaton, she stood and held out the long slender arm until every button was fastened, nor moved when the girl stooped and arranged the buckles on her colored shoes. She uttered no word, but, notwithstanding the warm June air, drew her wrappings closely around her, as if she were chilled.

"Pampered and nervous," thought Felix, as she at last threw herself among the crimson cushions of a lounge.

In the meantime, Adam, an old servant to Baron Krafft, had come from the house, leading his little daughter by the hand. Adam was one of the oldest servants at Schillingscourt; his equable temper was proverbial in the house, and his character beyond reproach. He was a widower, and the little ten-year-old girl with him his only child. He had ever been respected by his fellow-servants, and Felix was consequently surprised when the lady's-maid flounced past him with an impudent shrug, and the lady herself failed to take notice of his greeting; and his astonishment became still greater as he now observed the old man's frantic actions as he hastened from the Column House toward the Cloister estate, where an angry gobbler made an attack upon the child, as if he wanted to tear her red dress from her person. The little one screamed and clung to her father, who drove the turkey away and endeavored to pacify her; but his manner was strange, and his face was wild and flushed as if he were intoxicated. As he left the window to go down and see the old man, of whom Felix was quite fond, he gave one more glance toward the shaded avenue, and saw Baron Krafft approach, leaning on his son's arm; then, with a chivalrous hand-wave, seat himself beside his daughter-in-law. But Felix's interest turned from this scene to the one below. He paused at the foot of the stairs a moment. The domestic had departed with her butter and eggs, and his mother was in the act of removing a roasted fowl from the oven.

"My brother is not at home, Adam," said she, to the man standing in the kitchen door; and, placing the steaming pan on the table, she added: "I hope you are not here to bother him about that foolish affair again?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lucian, I am here for that purpose," he replied, firmly, but respectfully. "The senator is the only one who can help me—he knows that I am innocent—he will honor truth and justice."

"You must be crazy, man!" rejoined the lady, tartly. "Do you, perhaps, expect Senator Wolfram to swear that he has never been intimately associated with Baron Schilling's servants?"

"What is the trouble between the families?" Felix queried, greatly surprised.

"Oh, Mr. Felix, the trouble is robbing me of home and honor!" Adam replied, with trembling accents. Formerly the old man had hailed his return with delight; to-day he did not seem to be conscious that this was the first meeting after a long absence. "My good old master has just called me a cheat, a miserable spy, and threw his beautiful goblet at me, and broke it in a thousand pieces upon the floor."

"What nice, what noble manners!" Mrs. Lucian remarked, dryly. She had taken a platter from the cupboard, and was examining it closely by the window, to see if speck or blur marred its surface.

Her son was indignant at this busy indifference in the face of the sadly altered old man. Extending a friendly hand, he said, sincerely sympathetic: "I can not imagine what should induce your master to become so demonstrative—particularly against his faithful Adam. Why, he always preferred you to—"

"Didn't he, Mr. Lucian, didn't he? And now—now everything is changed. Oh, my God!" the old man lamented, tears filling his eyes. "He calls me a spy—me! I am supposed to have listened, and concerned myself about that coal mine business."

Felix looked inquiringly at his mother.

"He refers to the coal discovery in the valley," she explained, in her terse fashion. "Baron Schilling always was a presuming person; he thinks other people incapable of discernment; the same ideas his brains develop must not strike common mortals."

"But it was not his own idea, Mrs. Lucian," Adam earnestly remarked. "You see, Mr. Felix, the Schillings and Wolframs might have continued to till the monastery grounds for centuries longer, without thinking of taking a hand's breadth of the stony land adjoining it, much less buying any of the miserable land. Old Gotter, the owner, cursed the barren stones often enough, and, like his neighbors, never dreamed

of the wealth lying buried there. But when that stranger engineer came down here, he saw at a glance what a bed of coal lay there under their very eyes."

"And so there was," interrupted Mrs. Lucian, as she unfolded a snowy towel and began to wipe the platter.

"And, being well acquainted with my master, he proposed they buy the land in partnership, and open a coal mine at once. My master joyfully entered into the contract, and everything was settled in secret; but as Master Arnold's wedding was about to take place in Coblentz just then, they postponed purchasing the land until after the marriage. That any one else might step in before them never entered their heads. Not a soul—so they believed—knew anything about the coal being there but themselves. When—think of it—they saw old Gotter he was cursing and fuming like a madman—he had sold the land to Senator Wolfram for a trifle, and but just discovered its value—too late to help himself. Tell me, Mr. Lucian, is not this witchcraft?"

"A singular coincidence, to say the least of it," Felix exclaimed in astonishment.

"That is what I say. It is luck, and your uncle is not to blame for his neighbor's procrastination," said his mother; "but old Gotter lies when he says he sold the land for a trifle. He laughed in his sleeve at the time, to think he had disposed of his untillable land so advantageously."

Cool and sober, decided and conclusive, was this judgment; and notwithstanding her somewhat countrified manners, the lady was fine looking. She was still slender and her handsome face was crowned with beautiful braids of nut-brown hair, thick and glossy as a young girl's. The former officer's wife, with all her busy-bee existence, never forgot her position. She was always well robed and carefully combed, even though the pretty feet were incased in leather boots, and a blue linen apron tied over her elegantly fitting dress.

"Here, eat, child," said she, handing Adam's little daughter a piece of cake. The girl turned her darkly frowning face away and declined to take it.

"She won't take anything, Mrs. Lucian," said Adam, brokenly; "she has not eaten a mouthful to-day. She can't bear to have people be out of humor with me, and to-day there has been nothing but strife and scolding. Ah! Mr. Felix, I've had a hard time of it lately. My master insists that there has been underhand work—that there is a Judas in the house; and because I was in and out of the room with wine while the gentlemen were talking about the matter, suspicion rests on poor

unhappy me. I could bear the taunts and hints with patience —for my Henny's sake I clung to the home;" he placed his hand tenderly upon the child's dark hair in speaking, "but, since yesterday—for people are all talking about the wonderful good fortune of the senator and his mine; the coal is said to be equal to the best English—my old master is like a changed man. I only wanted to beg once more that the senator would explain to my master, to make him believe that I had nothing—"

"That is impossible, Adam," Mrs. Lucian shortly interrupted with. "My brother will not be likely to make any apologies to the people who are secretly his enemies, because he happened to be as clever as they are. Just get that notion out of your head, and get yourself out of the scrape the best way you can."

The man gritted his teeth and struggled to conquer his bitter disappointment; then, with a deep sigh, remarked: "I might have known it. Between two such lordly gentleman, the honor of a poor miserable servant can go to pot! What is there left for an unhappy devil like me but the—river!" he exclaimed in desperation.

"Oh, no, father; not that! You won't do that!" the little girl cried.

"Don't talk so blasphemous, man," Mrs. Lucian rebuked, severely; but Felix took the child's face gently between his hands and tried to quiet her sobbing.

"Don't cry, dear; your father is too brave and good to do anything like that. I will go over to Schillingscourt, if you wish, Adam, and speak to the baron."

"No; but thank you for your good-will, Mr. Felix. It will only cause you annoyance, and will not help me," was the despondent reply. "Come, child, we will go to your grandmother's."

"Yes, father, let us go there; but you will stay there, won't you?" she queried, anxiously, while choking down her tears. "You won't go away in the night, father?"

"No, no, my good Henny," the man replied, putting his arm around her as the two walked toward the gate.

The gobbler ran for her red frock again, but she did not heed him; eagerly bending forward, looking into her father's face while keeping step with him, she did not trust his mechanically uttered "no;" she was seeking assurance from his countenance while speaking. "I sha'n't sleep a bit at all; mind now!" she threatened, with tear-quivering voice; "I shall see you if you go out!" The gate closed upon them, and still

they heard the unutterably distressed accents and the childish threat—"I won't sleep a wink; I'll see you if you leave the house, and I'll run after you, father!" Mrs. Lucian shrugged her shoulders, saying, with her usual *sang froid:*

"You can't do anything with such people; they go off on a tangent at the least thing."

"Well, I should really like to see the individual who could keep a calm mental equipoise, when, through false accusations, he is being robbed of character and position!" Felix excitedly exclaimed. "Pardon, mamma, but for centuries the Cloister estate has produced nothing but wealthy and sensible people—but one impulsive human heart."

"We have 'for centuries' baked weekly six charity loaves, whether the harvest has been good or not. We also help the poor in other ways, even though we make no public display of our benevolence. But we are not natures carried away by impulse, nor rush headlong with every high-headed idea. To be sure, you were not born in the Cloister estate"—how sharp that cold voice could become on occasion—"you are one of the new-fashioned enthusiasts, who, in lifting one person sky-high, trample the rights of another under foot. Do you really think your uncle is in duty bound to make a public declaration, stating that he was not aware of Baron Schilling's 'secret?'"

"Not exactly that, but—"

"It wouldn't help that singular creature Adam, any more than it would benefit that old man in Schillingscourt. That 'brilliant' marriage did not restore the mortgaged estate unconditionally, by any means. The young lady's guardian, a sly fox, drew up a marriage contract that left the Schillings much to wish for. This is probably the cause of the old gentleman's bad humor, for which the servants suffer."

"Poor old Papa Schilling!" exclaimed Felix, sorrowfully; "no wonder he feels bitterly disappointed—doubly so under these circumstances. That coal mine would have been his salvation. I am very, very sorry; the poor man is forced to do penance for his predecessors."

His mother seemed very much occupied. She made no reply, although she knew to the contrary; but she never corrected or contradicted, only in her own interest, and then she could do so energetically. While her son was pacing the floor she prepared a cucumber for salad.

"It is extraordinary, however, that two heads should have entertained the same idea at almost the same hour, in connec-

tion with a treasure that had lain before them, without their suspecting it, for ages," Felix remarked, after awhile.

"H'm—I rarely ask questions, but have my opinions formed by what I see. Your uncle may possibly be quite as clever as that engineer, but didn't care to undertake the risk when he made the discovery first; but since little Guy's arrival the Wolframs bloom again, and it is their duty to acquire and provide anew."

"Good heavens! Is this delving and 'acquiring' to continue into all eternity, mamma? I should think your family had more than enough long ago."

Mrs. Lucian turned about angrily, and cast a long, unpleasantly surprised look upon her son. There was not a spark of the Wolfram spirit in the boy. "More than enough;" none had ever ventured upon so audacious a thought, much less expressed it on the Cloister estate. Such remarks might scare the genius of abundance, like a sudden cry startling the sleep-walker from safety to ruin.

"Our wealth is not a subject for discussion in the family—recollect that!" said she with cutting emphasis, washing her hands meanwhile under the hydrant above the kitchen sink.

"Your dinner is ready—go into the room. I'll be there directly," she added, brusquely.

It was a rude command. Felix bit his lips angrily, and passed by his mother and entered the adjoining room. Here the dining-table had always stood, and the space in the arched window was the undisputed seat of the lady of the house. The windows faced the back yard, like those in the kitchen. The out-buildings and stone wall separated the place from Schillingscourt. Along the second story of the building ran a porch, with a number of doors leading into what had once been the monks' cells; they were now used as granaries and store-rooms for fruit. Rakes and sieves hung on the outer walls, and the wooden balusters were covered with drying grain-sacks and horse-blankets.

The yard and room below were shadowed by this porch, and more so still by the monster branches of an ancient maple, that spread its long arms over the place. In this greenish, uncertain light stood the sewing-table, and here the senator's quiet wife had passed the restful hours of her none too affection-enriched married life. The cackling from the poultry-yard, the bellowing of the cattle in the stables, the bustling of the field-hands and milk-maids—this had been the daily music of her solitary existence. Felix recollected that she upon one occasion brought the wicker cradle, with its sleeping girl baby, into the

room, under the impression that her stern husband had gone. Quite unexpected he returned, and she had started, like some guilt-detected culprit, thimble, shears, and needle-case dropping on the floor, as she listened to his reproof, with her pale face turning crimson, as he gave a sneering glance at the cradle, remarking: "This was his dining-room, and not the nursery!"

The scene was vividly called to his mind on entering the room, for on almost the identical spot a child was now sleeping—but not in the primitive wicker-basket, with its check bed-clothes—a handsome crib, with green silk drapery, and a green veil hung over the soft white spread. The chair beside the sewing-stand, where the mild-faced woman used to sit, was occupied by a square-built person with a cloth tied above a stupidly impertinent face, who was knitting on a coarse stocking. She made no attempt to rise when the young gentleman came in, but continued rocking the crib with her foot. She was perfectly conscious that, for the time being, the "nurse" was the most important person about the place.

Felix would like to have taken a peep at his slumbering cousin, but the sight of that odious female usurping his aunt's place incensed him.

He seated himself at the table, and drew from his pocket a leathern case containing a silver knife and fork. It was the only thing belonging to the Lucian household that the angry, implacable woman had taken with her from Königsberg—a present to Felix from his long-since deceased grandfather, General Lucian. It had been stowed away in a remote corner of an upstairs closet, where Felix had found it during a recent visit home. Recognizing his property with secret delight, and notwithstanding his mother's protest, he had claimed it.

Pushing aside the wooden-handled knife and fork belonging to the house, he laid his own on the napkin spread for him.

At this moment his mother entered with a roasted chicken and the cucumber salad on a waiter, and was about placing a warmed plate before her son, when her eyes fell on the change he had made. She colored, and remained motionless.

"Well, is our table-ware not fine enough for you?" said she, hoarsely.

"It is not that, mamma," rejoined the young man, looking almost tenderly at the name engraved in large letters—Lucian—upon the handle of the articles; "but it makes me happy to possess something belonging to the old days. I shall never part from these mementoes. I remember well how he looked

—my glorious grandpapa—although I was but four years old when he died. Papa used—"

A clattering noise caused him to stop suddenly, and with affright he recollected that for the first time in many years that dear, but by his mother severely ostracized word "Papa," had escaped him. And now she stood before him, that angry mother, with glittering eyes, and every particle of color had deserted her face, a sudden spasm of the hand had involuntarily dashed the plate to the floor. The nurse gave a shriek, and the child began to scream at the top of its voice.

"Well! Mrs. Lucian, the senator ought to know this! It's enough to frighten little Guy into fits!" the woman impudently corrected, as she lifted the child from its crib.

To the unbounded astonishment of her son, the haughty lady made no reply. She assisted in quieting the screamer, and then gathered up the fragments of the broken dish and went into the kitchen. Felix knew how fervently a direct Wolfram heir had been longed for in the house, but he had no idea that this youngster in swaddling clothes was such a power on the estate. He gazed with secret dismay at the mop of black hair protruding from under the slightly disarranged cap on its head. Could the senator's wife, with her fine blue-eyed, fair-faced girl-babies, look upon her earthly home, she would have been startled to see the gypsy-like little fellow whose life had been purchased with her own. His ears stood out boldly from the brown, wrinkled, meager face; his long thin fingers squirmed claw-like upon the white swaddling pillow. Such was the Wolfram heir.

"Sleep, baby, sleep—sleep gently as a sheep," sung the nurse in a cracked voice, keeping time with her hand on the back of her charge, as she marched across the room and pushed open a door leading into a large apartment with an immensely arched window overlooking the front yard. This was the senator's office and private room. The child was hushed, and the nurse pushed open the shutters and began to joke with some hands at work in front of the window. This was a most unheard-of proceeding on the Cloister estate. However simple the household arrangements, the servants had always been severely disciplined and kept in slave-like subjection—the Wolframs understood the art of inspiring respect.

Mrs. Lucian had returned with another plate, and merely cast a passing glance at the noisy window; not a feature of her handsome countenance gave evidence of the shocked emotions of a moment before; and for the first time in his life this calm exterior appeared unnatural to her son. The last few

minutes had proved to him that beneath this cool indifference and unmoved circumspection there glowed in the soul of his mother a smothered fire that one little word had fanned into a flame. Opposite the table was the coarsely chiseled stone-work of an arched door. This had led to the elevated parterre of the Column House corridor, and the passage-way from the monastery kitchen to the Column House dining-room—in fact the only connecting door between the two buildings.

When the property was divided, the door had been walled up, but the practical Wolframs had left a little space on their side, forming a shallow closet. The door to this Mrs. Lucian unlocked now—here were kept the household account books, and the tin box into which flowed the moneys taken in from the sale of milk, poultry, etc. Felix watched his mother gloomily as she removed from her belt a strong leather satchel and emptied its contents—all small change—into the kitchen treasury. She was obliged to stand—like the senator's wife before her—at the milk-table and measure out the exact quantities. She had to chase the poultry into captive quarters, and get the vegetables from the garden, and collect the money therefor from the purchasers. Felix could scarcely swallow his dinner for vexation; and his temper was not improved when the coarse laughter of the nurse rang through the house. He threw down the knife and fork, and got up. "How can you tolerate such vulgarity, mamma?" he exclaimed, angrily.

"If I lacked discretion, very likely I should not endure it," she quietly replied. "The child is delicate and his life depends on that coarse person; so I put up with it and remain silent."

Her son felt the blood mount to his face. This woman sacrificed her very principles for the benefit of her brother's child, and her *own* she had made fatherless rather than remain silent; scenes between his parents were called to mind; he remembered well how coldly unrelenting she had maintained the last word, until the exasperated husband had rushed from the room furious with temper.

Would she have passed her son with such superb indifference in going into the adjoining room, had she imagined the stormy feelings raging so bitterly in his bosom at this moment?

"We had better close the window, Trine," said she pleasantly to the nurse; "the draught might injure the baby."

"God forbid; there is no draught here at all, or I should have felt it. I am the nurse, Mrs. Lucian, and I ought to know what is best, and what not," the female retorted. She was probably familiar with the lady's determined character, however, for while grumbling her impertinent reply, and while

the shutters were being fastened behind her, she had returned to the crib, laid down the child, and resumed her knitting.

In the meantime Felix had crossed the threshold of his uncle's room, to his own surprise, with something of the timidity of his boyhood. The walls were still lined with the disagreeable-smelling calf-bound books. His uncle had long since retired from public life, but during his terms of office this had been the so-called "business room," and a respect-inspiring object for everybody in the house. Often loud voices had re-echoed along this hall in violent altercation, and frequently men had rushed away, banging the doors after them; for the senator was not a favorite with the people. They hated him for his overbearing character and his scoffing, arbitrary disposition.

Felix was hardly ever permitted to enter the room, unless sent there to be reprimanded by his uncle, and yet he used to stand there as if magically chained, after the rebuke had been delivered, until ordered out by the senator.

Along the southern wall ran a gallery divided by a flight of narrow stairs. Here were represented a number of rudely executed Biblical scenes, carved in the wooden panels. These distorted figures, with wonderful disks of glory emitting rays about their heads, were not what had attracted the lad's eyes —it was the organ up there.

It was a primeval affair, with a few pewter pipes and very broad keys. It had been built by a monk, in fact by the abbot himself, and this room had been his retreat. The Wolframs had not disturbed its original arrangements. It had its pious uses, and they were all solicitous not to profane that which might bless their prosperity: like many other egotistical human souls, they mingled their fear of God with a fear of losing their worldly goods. To be sure, they never acknowledge this.

At the first glance, Felix noticed that the organ had disappeared. Mute with surprise, he pointed to the plain board of stained wood between the carved panels.

"You are astonished," said his mother; "it gave us all a terrible fright. The pipes had long seemed tottering, but we thought nothing about that; and the day after Guy's birth the whole thing came tumbling down with a frightful noise. It has been useless only as it served as a haunt for mice; but it grieved us, nevertheless, for the Wolframs have all held it sacred. Your uncle would permit no strange hand to clear away the ruin; he collected every scrap religiously—not a splinter found its way to the kitchen stove."

Felix stepped up on the gallery and opened the plain space

that formed a door. Sure enough, in the excavation where the organ had stood, the remains were carefully piled; the pipes, the round-bellied wooden angels that had guarded them, and every little scrap of the instrument seemed to have been gathered, as if ruin for the whole Cloister estate might be scattered broadcast by the straying of one splinter.

If this was his uncle's work, then the repairs in the damaged wall must have been done by him also. Felix observed that some new boards had been nailed across the top of the opening in the wall, and laughingly exclaimed to his mother, who was just leaving the room: "Uncle has been working in defiance of a carpenter!"

At this instant the door to the front hall opened, and a heavy step crossed the threshold.

"What are you hunting up there, sir?" The words came sharp and in disagreeably surprised accents.

Felix started—this tone, coming from his uncle, always affected his nerves like a shrill metallic sound, but he hastened down the steps, and with a graceful inclination of the head extended a hand to the speaker.

"Will you have the goodness to close the door of that closet you have so inquisitively been prying into?" the senator said with a frown, oblivious of the extended hand. "And since when has it been the custom here for you to seek a welcome in my private apartment?"

The young man had cleared the space with a bound, and was trying to shut the swollen door as he replied, ironically: "Since your hired help have cleared the way, uncle." He looked over his shoulder into the other room, where the nurse had just bobbed a respectful courtesy to her master.

"The senator knows that little Guy won't go to sleep anywhere else," the woman retorted in justification.

The senator threw his hat on the table without remark. Tall, not very broad across the shoulders, but the picture of vigor and strength was this man; in the ancient costume of ruffles and lace, with plumed hat, he would have made an admirable Wallenstein figure. His closely cut, slightly gray hair came to a point in the center of his forehead. His small, intelligent face was turned to a healthy nut-brown color.

He went with muffled footsteps toward the crib, and, carefully lifting the veil, bent over the sleeping child and listened.

"What is this, Trine? The little fellow breathes irregular—he appears feverish." The man's face was almost agonized; the self-important expression gave place to intense solicitude.

"Little Guy has been awfully frightened," replied the nurse,

folding her hands over her stomach, and added, complainingly: "He can't stand any noise at all, poor child, and Mrs. Lucian dropped a plate on the floor awhile ago. I nearly died with fright. I knew it would make him sick, he cried so hard, Mr. Senator."

The senator gave his sister a very black look, but said nothing. Mrs. Lucian was pale with wrath as she walked around the table, absently picking up first one thing then another. Then she hastened to the crib and placed her hand on the child's head.

"You are imaginative—there is nothing the matter with the child," she said, in her short, decided fashion; but seemingly relieved, herself, with the result of her examination.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the senator. "I know, Teresa, you understand such things; but would it not have been better for Felix to dine up in your room? Trine is right, Guy can't stand noise, not even loud talking. While your son remains, we will occupy the front corner room. But the child must be taken to his room at once; the air is heavy with the smell of cooking here."

He placed his hands upon the head of the crib and motioned the nurse to take hold of the foot, but Mrs. Lucian anticipated her, and thus brother and sister carried the new bearer of the Wolfram name—a creature, in their estimation, precious as a crown prince—through kitchen and hall-way, the nurse following with a grand spread of double chin and a partly knitted stocking.

CHAPTER III.

The door was left open, and Felix felt a lively desire to go out and never more return to this inhospitable "hawk's nest," from which the miserable, sickly family scion, with his weak claws, had already cast him, the inmate of another breed. Surely he was neither envious nor jealous, he had hailed the news of this Wolfram arrival with joy; the thought had ever been odious to him that he might at some future time be forced to reside permanently in that dismal Cloister house. But he did not dream that with the first breath drawn by this little misshapen fellow a change would take place that would make his life on the Cloister estate intolerable, and, to a certain extent, also make him homeless. His uncle had but just implied that his presence was superfluous, because it affected the delicate nerves of his son. The senator had treated the dreamy lad with harsh severity; but as years passed, approaching man-

hood had brought him some consideration, and something like confidential association was established between them. Felix raged inwardly. Not to his individual endeavors and honest striving to win his uncle's respect could he attribute the later usage, as he had believed; but consideration for the only one in whose veins some Wolfram blood flowed, for the prospective master of the Cloister estate—now the "necessary evil," the "makeshift," might be shaken off—in the silk-lined crib lay his own flesh and blood; and the "foreign element" was received again with the same arrogant treatment that met the poor little "humming-bird" on its first entrance to the hawk's nest.

And his mother? He did not doubt her mother love, though she was as niggardly in outward display of it as she was in spending money; she called all such demonstrations "affectation." She had an exalted opinion of her brother's character and judgment. His severity was the proper thing; a man should be hard and stern; a woman domestic and neat. She followed him blindly. Her few intimate acquaintances declared her to be a Spartan indeed where the house of Wolfram was concerned—her own son and his interests were secondary matters. The thought that the family name, which had bloomed for three hundred years high in public esteem, would die with her brother, had been a source of consuming grief to her. She never loved the little flaxen-haired nieces, and entertained a secret contempt for their mother. Felix was aware of this, and had noted the shadow that fell upon her face when any one remarked upon the name Lucian Wolfram as the future representative of the estate. She grudged this distinction to the name of him "who had wrecked her life." She would make no effort to dispel her son's impression, nor strive for a just foothold in his uncle's house for him. And why should she? He had no need of this inhospitable roof any longer.

The young man who, but a moment ago, had his foot upon the threshold with departing intention, turned back to the window—this was not a time to cultivate indignation—he had not, as he led his mother falsely to believe, come home for "recreation," but to hold a very important conference.

An apprehensive dread caused his heart to throb suddenly. While still in Berlin this interview seemed a trifling affair; but since looking once more into those two reserved faces in the background of the strictly simple, severely regulated country household, the subject had become a giant-like difficulty.

"Lucille!" he sighed, as his gaze wandered through the foliaged branches of the great elm that the setting sun made

transparent with its radiant light. As if in response to his call, a willowy figure, with long curling hair falling over its shoulders, glided over the verdure-tinted ground. Every nerve of this seventeen-year-old being seemed alive with fun and mischief, the beautifully curved lips quivering with saucy wantonness. He felt the white, warm, girlish arms closing about his neck; felt her breath upon his cheeks, and the bliss that had intoxicated him for months thrilled him again, and gave him courage and confidence in his ideal views of life once more. His mother had returned to the kitchen, and was cutting a couple of generous slices of bread for two beggar children standing in the hall. The janitor was there also; Felix heard his firm footfall on the flag-stones, and he started to join them, but halted suddenly.

The kitchen window was open, and he heard one of the field hands say to a woman carrying an armful of clover to the stables: "Say, the old man at Schillingscourt has sent Adam away in a hurry—the coachman told me. He thinks it's too bad."

"Attend to your work! I don't pay you for gossiping!" the senator called out. The man started as if he had been struck. Banging the window shut, the senator turned with a frown to his sister, saying, as he took from a stone ledge one of the shining tumblers: "Do you allow those people to waste their time in talking right under your eyes?"

"That is a superfluous question. You know very well that I always maintain discipline; but the workmen are excited about Adam's dismissal—he has been discharged on account of that coal mine affair. He was here again with his lamentations—he even threatened to drown himself."

Felix observed his uncle staring absently at the porch railing strung with grain-sacks and horse-blankets, and twisting at his chin whiskers as if he only half heard what his sister was saying.

"Bah! idle talk!" he cut her off shortly with; and filling his glass under the hydrant, he drank the clear, bubbling water at one breath; then passing his handkerchief over his mustache, and also mopping his brow as if that was moist as well, he added: "I'll have to give this Baron von Schilling a decisive overhauling, I'm thinking; he is going entirely too far with his childish wrath about this matter."

"That is all the vindication Adam needs, uncle; all he asks is that some light may be thrown on the manner of your coincident discovery," Felix remarked.

The senator turned. He had large gray-blue eyes that

looked upon his fellow-men with a supercilious, unfeeling expression, as a rule, but they could gleam in a partly closed fashion from under their heavy brows, like suppressed sparks, and thus they surveyed the elegantly dressed, fine-looking youth standing in the door-way, from head to foot; then his glance fell on the shabby hat held in his own hand—for the senator rarely bought a new one.

Ignoring his nephew's remarks, he began dusting his clothes and coarse boots with his handkerchief, and indicating Felix with a motion of his head, while a sarcastic smile played about his lips, he said to his sister:

"He stands there like a living fashion-plate, Teresa—a tailor's model—so fine and polished! That natty jacket would look well in a coal mine or a hay-loft, Felix."

"Well, uncle, you see it was not made to be worn in either of those places. Coal mines and hay-lofts! What have I to do with them?" Felix replied, smiling to disguise his irritation.

"Indeed! Have you then retired from active life already? You see, Teresa? I always told you these visionary minds were better off than we are; they throw away a hundred thousand dollars as if they were so many pebbles. Ahem! Felix, my little Guy played you quite a trick. The Cloister estate is no bagatelle!"

Felix's hearing was sensitively strung to the intonations of his uncle's voice. He fancied he perceived a wild triumph in its ring now—joy at his supposed discomfiture, an intention to wound him, and unbounded pride in the possession of an heir. "Thank God, I am not envious. I hope the child will live and be a joy to you." There was sincerity in the wish, and in the frank, open countenance of the speaker. "But if you think I am indifferent to this world's goods, you are mistaken," he added, "for never have I wished for wealth as much as at the present time."

"Are you in debt?" the senator queried, sharply.

Felix erected his head proudly with a negative shake.

"Why, then? Has your mother put you on short allowance, and do you want more money to invest in such trash?" He approached the young man, and touched a charm attached to his watch-chain. "As I live, these are diamonds!" he cried, examining the locket closely. "Is this your taste, Teresa?"

Mrs. Lucian removed her kitchen apron, and hung it on a nail, then joined her brother, saying, without exhibiting any interest further than giving a quick, covert glance at the jewel:

"I never buy such modern foolery." Then she lifted her dark, penetrating eyes, like a scrutinizing judge, to her son's crimsoning face, and asked, shortly: "Where did you get it?"

"From a lady—"

"Young ladies, my boy, rarely have money enough to make such presents," the senator interpolated, swinging the locket back and forth with evident pleasure. "I'll tell you where you got it, Felix—from your friend Baroness Leo. The expensive locket probably contains a venerable lock of gray hair —eh?"

"No, uncle, a glossy brown one," he replied, desirous of being honest. A happy smile illuminated his face, but the next instant he experienced a sensation of fright. The decisive moment was at hand, and he was unprepared for it. The two stoics stood before him—malice and sarcasm on the face of one; displeasure and surprise on the other. Never had he faced the stolid Wolfram spirit with so little courage as in this distressing moment.

"Be patient, mamma," said he, coaxingly, taking both her hands and pressing them to his bosom. "Give me time—"

"No!" she interrupted, releasing herself from his hold. "You know I always insist on explanations at once, whenever there has been any misunderstanding—and there seems to be a very significant one just now. Do you suppose I'm going to be kept awake to-night thinking about the dark road you appear to be traveling? Who is the person?"

The big blue eyes of the young man began to sparkle with indignation. He remained silent, and endeavored to compose himself by passing his hand over his brow and the splendid blonde waves of hair that fell over it.

"What a brave champion you are!" sneered the senator. "What's the matter—are you afraid we'll eat you and your brown-haired girl? She can't be a beggar if she has diamonds to give away. It's the family—pedigree not all right—don't like to own up, eh? Ashamed of—"

"Ashamed—ashamed of my Lucille? of Lucille Fournier! Ask about her in Berlin, and they will tell you that half the titles in the city are at her feet—that she could marry into a family of the highest rank, had she not preferred me. But I know that an exotic can not flourish in a German corn-field, and I know that everything called talent meets with but little favor in this house; I was only embarrassed because I knew the stubborn prejudices I should have to contend with—not for myself did I hesitate, but to evade the unkind words that

I was certain would be hurled at my Lucille—by an unprepared disclosure. And I will not tolerate them!"

They had driven him desperately, and his self-respect resented it. He looked fearlessly into his mother's face. She stood staring at him like a statue, her pale lips drawn deeply down into a hard curve, one hand braced on a corner of the table.

"Lucille's mother," continued Felix, abruptly, "is a celebrated woman."

"And the father—is he celebrated too?" the senator queried, with a sneer.

"The parents are separated, like—" he was about to say, "like my own," but the sudden flashing of his mother's eyes caused him to leave the sentence unfinished. A silence ensued; but, feeling the necessity of bringing this distressing situation to an end, he said, hurriedly:

"Madame Fournier is the *danseuse*—"

"Ah, bah, Felix, speak German!" the senator interrupted, ironically. "Say the ballet-dancer, with short dresses and bare neck, who flies across the stage every night—b-r-r-r"—he gave himself a shake and laughed scornfully—"that is the prospective mother-in-law, Teresa!"

With severe reproach he lifted his forefinger at his sister, his sharp face hardening into the misanthropically hateful expression that made him so disliked by the public.

"Do you remember what I prophesied five-and-twenty years ago? I told you the time would come when you would curse your choice of a husband in your children? Did I not? Now shake the despicable element off, if you can!"

"That is impossible now," she replied, calmly; "but the frivolous stuff he wants to fetch into the house, that I'll shake off, depend on it!"

The entrance of a girl with a basket of greens that she placed on the kitchen-table, and began to prepare for cooking, silenced her for the moment. Sending the girl into the yard, she bolted the door in the hall and returned.

The young man's heart beat furiously, as the woman in her black, flowing mourning dress, and perfectly colorless but determined face, advanced rapidly toward him, and he involuntarily placed his hand on the locket.

His mother smiled in cold disdain as she noted the action.

"Don't be alarmed!" said she. "I have no intention of touching that disreputable present with my honest hands; we all know how such people get their diamonds. Be sensible—it is my wish and request that you remove it yourself—if not,

experience will make you wish that you had cast it from you with disgust—"

"Never!" he exclaimed, as with a smile of triumphant love he unfastened the jewel and pressed it fervently to his lips.

"Tomfoolery!" muttered the senator between his teeth.

Mrs. Lucian's eyes gleamed suddenly with a passion of jealousy uncommon to that coldly calculating, complacent nature.

"Tomfoolery!" again exclaimed the senator, as Felix placed the precious token in his breast-pocket, and placed his hand over it tenderly as if he were holding the donor to his heart. "I should think you would be ashamed to conduct yourself in such a theatrical manner before decent people. It's incomprehensible to me how you can presume to mention such *liaisons* in the presence of your reputable family on the Cloister estate —such things are never spoken of by respectable people—"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Felix, unable to restrain himself.

"Mr. Attorney!" sneered the senator, crossing his arms and staring contemptuously at his nephew.

"You are making yourself ridiculous with your absurd indignation," his mother said, quietly, placing her hand upon the clinched fist of her son, that had been lifted involuntarily to a threatening attitude. She was her unruffled self again; neither son nor brother had observed the unnatural glow in her eyes. "Your uncle is right. It required courage to speak of such people before us."

"Surely not more than my poor Lucille will have to summon in confessing her love for me to her family," replied Felix. "Madame Fournier lives like a princess in Berlin, and her mother, a lady of high social standing, presides in the house, and entertains persons of the highest rank. Arnold von Schilling can tell you that we were simply humble individuals in that brilliant circle—the central figure and idol of which Lucille has been for the last year. She is more beautiful than her mother and quite as talented, and mother and grandmother look upon her as the rising star—"

"Will you please inform me what the characters are of the wives who visit this Madame Fournier with their husbands?" queried his mother, with cutting emphasis.

Felix was annoyed, and his eyes sought the floor as he replied:

"The gentlemen are nearly all unmarried—"

"And the married ones leave their honest wives at home!" quickly said the mother, with indescribable malignity and scorn. "If you imagine you can dazzle me with their lamentable

splendor and aped aristocracy, you are greatly mistaken. I know the vile, the dissolute life behind the painted canvas. The knowledge was dearly bought."

Felix started as this one ray of light, contained in his mother's words, fell upon his childish recollections of the old home in Königsberg—he began to understand why she had gone out muffled and closely veiled after nightfall. She had secretly followed his father. This acknowledgment robbed him of all hope—he had not only to contend against "narrow-minded prejudices," but the insulted wife, who had seen herself supplanted by "that class of people," stood before him in her outraged majesty. He grew desperate. "I am not at liberty to deny your assertion, for I do not know what your experience has been," said he, striving to speak calmly; "in some respects I agree with you, but I can assure you that in the Fournier establishment propriety has never been violated. Lucille has never appeared in public, although she is considered a finished actress—her mother having been her teacher; her own star is in its decline, and she looks forward to a splendid future for her daughter—the profits of which, of course, she expects to share. She is so set upon this idea that the addresses of Count L—— for Lucille's hand have been ignored. Lucille is soon to make her *début;* I am anxious to prevent this, as I have no wish to marry an actress and my visit to you was for the purpose of—"

"Is the girl fond of dancing?" Mrs. Lucian asked, dryly.

"Passionately so; but she is willing to give up everything for my sake;" his voice trembled with tenderness as he said it. "Judge by this how well she loves me, mamma."

An expressively mocking smile was his answer.

"And, as I gather from your remarks, this mamma in Berlin, with an eye for dividends, knows nothing of these blissful hopes and plans?"

"No," Felix replied, greatly oppressed by the aggravating manner assumed by his mother; "as a man of honor it was my duty to find out first what I had to offer Madame Fournier in compensation for sacrificing her own plans, in taking my chances with other suitors for Lucille's hand."

"I should think there would be little difficulty in summing up that matter," the senator remarked. "I fancy your income as attorney would just about provide Mademoiselle Fournier with pin money."

The young man's face became red with a sense of shame and indignation, but controlling himself, he replied:

"I thought of leaving the city and opening an office here in town."

"Collect your senses, Felix, they must be wandering." Mrs. Lucian placed her hand on his arm heavily, and her voice rang with implacable rancor. "Let me help you clear the mist from your brain, by prompting you in what you will say to this Madame Fournier, who entertains in such grand style and lives like a princess, who declined titles for her daughter, and expects to realize millions from the ballet prancing of her scholar. By adhering strictly to facts, you will say to her: 'I have no prospect, I own not a farthing's worth of real estate, and depend entirely on my clients for a means of subsistence. Your princess daughter will be obliged to don a kitchen apron, cook, patch and darn; her social talents are of no value to me, for the best room in a poor lawyer's house would scarcely be a suitable apartment in which to receive distinguished notabilities —and, in my mother's house she will under no circumstances be received.'"

"Oh, mother!" cried the young man.

"My son," she continued, disregarding his wail of despair, "you remarked just now that you wanted to be rich, very rich. I have no doubt of it, for it requires money to run a 'princely establishment;' you thought your mother's wealth would move the balance in your favor—and you may not be quite wrong there—but every penny of this money, that has been accumulating for centuries, is the result of industry and economy; and this I tell you once for all"—her symmetrical figure rose to its fullest height as she imperiously lifted her right hand—"rather than see the savings of our honest hands and honorable labor squandered by a debauching theatrical rabble, I would bequeath it, sou for sou, back to the Wolfram name. Now act according!"

"Is this your ultimatum, mother?" asked Felix, with pale lips and dimmed eyes.

"My ultimatum. Forget the girl. You must; I insist on it. I am speaking for your own good. The time will come when you will thank me."

"People are not apt to be grateful toward those who have destroyed their happiness!" Felix retorted, now fully aroused. "Pour your wealth into yon Wolfram crib and welcome! It is yours to do with as you see fit; but thereby you forfeit the right to dictate in a matter that effects my whole existence. You prescribe for me with an egotistical dominion as if I were a thing without flesh or blood, a piece of wax that you can remodel at pleasure with the Wolfram spirit. You changed the

course of my destiny on your own responsibility once before—that was an unwarrantable robbery. I was then a child, and had to follow whither you willed; I have now a will of my own, and you shall not a second time subject me to a cruel deprivation!"

"My Lord!" groaned the woman as if she had received a fatal blow. She had taken a step toward the door as if she would have fled, then turned, and with uplifted hands stared in frightful amazement at her son; but the veins filled wrathily on the senator's brow as he clutched his nephew's arm and shook him in a brutal manner.

"What are you talking about, you miserable fellow? Of what have you been robbed, you beggar? Speak!"

"Of a father," Felix replied unmoved, but with an energetic shake releasing his arm from his uncle's grasp. "If a parent dies 'tis a dispensation of a higher power, and children are obliged to submit; but no one has a right to separate father and son and leave their lives incomplete. They belong to each other even more than mother and son. My father loved me unspeakably. I can feel the pulsations of his heart yet as he used to embrace me with such passionate tenderness. I can never forget it, nor my handsome soldier father whom you called 'frivolous,' because he had a warm, generous heart."

He drew a breath of infinite relief, as if a heavy burden that he had borne since boyhood were at last removed.

With the last words, his mother had left the room; he heard her dress sweeping over the kitchen flag-stones, he heard her open the glass door into the rear yard; he saw her cross it with bowed head and enter the back building leading into the garden.

"Prodigal son!" exclaimed the senator, hoarse with rage. "Your mother will never forgive you! Go! leave my house; there is no place here for such as you! Thank God that the Wolfram race lives anew in my son, and delivers us from the foreign cuckoo's brood."

He went into his room and slammed the heavy iron-bound door after him, while Felix hurriedly gathered up his only inheritance, the knife and fork, placed them in their case, and walked toward the door.

CHAPTER IV.

LIKE one stunned, he pushed back the bolt. The clock had struck six, and the hall was filled with women and children, and they were pouring in at the gate, with their tin and

earthen vessels. A milkmaid had just entered with two foaming buckets of milk, and looked astonished to see the place vacant at the head of the milk-table—for the first time during her service on the Cloister estate, even on the days of the senator's wife's death and funeral the place had been promptly filled the moment the milk was brought from the stables.

Felix passed through the throng—heretofore he had avoided the main stairway at this hour, and escaped the "milk business" by going up a dust-covered little back stairway.

To-day he gazed absently over their heads, unheeding the greetings and nudging of the women, who stared after the handsome young man, as he bounded up the creaking stairs—for the last time. Never would he return to that gloomy place, built by monks and inhabited for generations by the little-souled, heart-impoverished family who had made a coffin of it to fit their own souls, in which there was no room for an intellectual spark, and from which every modestly flighty pinion was rudely cut. His valise was up in the gable room. To get it and take the first train for Berlin was the only thing he could decide on for the present, with his brain on fire and his bosom raging so painfully. What the consequence would be, did not occur to him in the whirl of his emotions. He would see his friend Arnold at Schillingscourt and then return to Berlin. When he left there he was laboring under the excitement of the news that Mme. Fournier had made arrangements for Lucille's *début*. He realized that if she once entered upon a public career she would be lost to him, and Lucille had herself urged him to arrange his affairs and hasten to Vienna, where Mme. Fournier was giving entertainments just then, and come to some understanding with the lady in regard to their hopes; but in one short hour his plans had been wrecked.

He pressed his hands in desperation to his temples as if that could restore the sanguine expectations so suddenly perished, and throw light upon his darkened pathway. He felt but too well the truth of what his uncle had said. His mother would never pardon the enthusiastic espousal of his father's cause, much less forget how ruthlessly he had broken the silence in which he had cloaked his love and longing for his father all his life. But had she not met him with unfeeling and unyielding harshness—as always? He could not recall the time when she had ever reasoned with him in motherly tenderness, or interested herself in his childish troubles, or sympathized with his pleasures as mothers do, to enhance a joy, or soften a grief as with a caressing hand. Her training was a sharp command—and how ready she was to disinherit her own child.

This readiness was not the result of momentary pique—she must have been thinking of it before. A dark suspicion crept serpent-like into the confiding nature and trusting heart of Felix and clutched it like a demon. What if the Wolfram fanaticism of his mother had grown to such a degree that she welcomed this opportunity as an excuse to will her immense inheritance back to the family again?

He strode up and down the room as if chased by evil spirits. Impossible! He felt disgraced to allow such horrible suspicions to enter his mind. He blushed at the ignoble spirit of resentment that had engendered it. There upon that open page was recorded the solicitude with which his mother had thought of his future. To be sure, that array of household linen was calculated only for a wife after Mrs. Lucian's own heart—the daughter of some eminent official, or the heiress of some wealthy merchant—still that detracted nothing from her kindly intentions. And there between the windows hung his portrait—when she was busy sewing here she could look upon the face of her son whenever she lifted her eyes. No, her heart was not entirely void of affection, even though her prejudices and almost masculine severity made her appear cold and emotionless.

Hesitatingly he reached for his satchel—he was prepared to go, but he waited and listened for a familiar footstep. As a matter of course he was going away never to return to the Cloister estate, but he confessed to himself with keenest sorrow that it was impossible for him to do so without telling his mother how he regretted his hasty words—he must see her once more, though she should accept his apology and farewell with contemptuous silence.

The atmosphere had become sultry, the southern horizon had become darkly mottled, the threatening storm-clouds soon shut out the bright sky and foreshadowed an early nightfall.

Silence reigned in the front yard. The main gate was closed, the arch above it was wreathed with the clover which had clung to the jagged stones as the heaped-up loads passed through. The rattling of the little portal had also ceased after the last customer had gone with his milk-jug—the chickens were safely housed and the pea-fowl and turkeys roosted quietly under their low roofs—only a few pigeons were still active near the edge of the well-curb taking a late bath.

The shady avenues at Schillingscourt had also become quiet; the iron chairs and lounges had been divested of their gayly colored cushions and pillows, as the clouds gathered heavily above the trees.

Quarter after quarter of the hour passed, and still Felix paced the gable-room floor. It seemed to him as if the house had never been so deathly still as now that he was listening for a sound with such an oppressed heart and racing pulses. He stepped to the window again and looked out—at last a movement in the hall, the draught of the opening door lifted a stray curl from his temple lightly, but he did not turn, he dreaded to meet his mother's angry face.

A rustling as if a bird had fluttered in, permeating the air with the scent of roses, then a pair of soft, cool arms were laid about his neck, and the burning eyes of the waiting youth were covered by a pair of tender, small hands. A paralyzing fright sent his blood curdling in his veins.

"Lucille!" he groaned, hoarsely.

The pressing fingers fell from his eyes, and the sweetest little elf that ever met human sight clung to his neck with merry laughter. But Felix also caught a glimpse at the door of the barn-yard nymph who had ushered in the visitor.

"My God, Lucille! what have you done?"

The girlish arms retreated from his neck at this terrified exclamation, and the pretty oval face lengthened into grieved surprise.

"What have I done?" said she, poutingly. "I've run away. Is that anything awful?"

He made no reply, but looked anxiously toward the door. Heaven grant his mother would not come now. He felt as if his treasure, his idol, had wandered in a lion's den.

"For goodness' sake, Felix, don't stand there as if you had dropped your bread butter-side down!" the young lady remarked, giving her hat an impatient tug, bringing it down over her forehead. "Bah! the joke is a failure; I thought it would be more amusing. Well, I don't care"—she shrugged her shoulders—"I can go back again if your highness don't want me."

"No! oh, no!" Felix cried, clasping her in a rapturous embrace, and covering her face with passionate kisses.

"Pah!" She escaped his arms with a laugh, threw hat and pocket-handkerchief upon the table, and flung back a long curl that had fallen over her face and bosom. "There, now, you have come to your senses again, sweetheart," said she, gayly. "You ought to have been at our house yesterday—such a fuss! you can't imagine it. Mamma sent a dispatch stating she had sprained her ankle, and the manager had decided that I was to come at once and take her place. I was sitting on the balcony, feeding the parrot and myself on the

bonbonnière you had brought me, when that telegram exploded, like a wicked bomb-shell, our domestic peace. The maids, and messengers, and cooks — everybody and everything — were thrown into a state of flustration, and swarmed like disturbed ants in a sandhill."

The description wound up with a burst of melodious laughter, as she replaced the tiny gold watch that had become dislodged from her belt during the gesticulating scene.

"I wish you could have seen grandmamma," she continued; "she has the neuralgia in her left leg again, and is obliged to stick to the *fauteuil* as if she were nailed there. You know what an imposing air she can assume; and when she begins to talk about her ancient and noble family, and the long-since moldering Marquis Rougerole, I am ready to die with fright. Sure enough, she began to enumerate the Gastons and Henris that would turn in their graves, and stamped the floor with her unimpaired foot, and declared mamma's upper story was affected to permit me—the last of that noble race—to travel from pillar to post, with a stupid female like that maid of mine, Minna—and perhaps she is right," the girl added, with a roguish smile. With every indescribably graceful motion the costly bracelets on her arms clashed, and the silver-gray folds of her dress rustled, and the heavy perfume of roses she had brought into the room had long since absorbed that coming from the violet-scented linen presses.

She paused and looked up into the young man's face with her great starry eyes, in which a scintillating green vied with the hazel for color supremacy. He stood looking at her as if entranced: his troubles, the old-fashioned apartment of his deadly estranged mother had vanished, he saw only the fair mercurial little being upon whose curly head the Graces had lavished all their magic charms. She read the love intoxication of his glance, and cast herself upon his breast.

"Foolish Felix," she murmured, playfully tweaking his ear. "Now tell me what was the matter with you when I came? And I came in all the pride of having carried out the glorious idea of eloping—it was not such an easy matter either, I can tell you, for I have inherited from mamma, in every nerve and pulse of my body to the very littlest toe, a quivering desire to float and glide and dance—and that before a thousand eyes and a thousand mustached lips crying at the top of their voices 'Bravo!'—this was all very enticing, sweetheart."

With a serpentine movement of her slender body, she escaped his arms again; his blonde brows gathered with a frown, and she laughingly passed her hand over them. "Grandmamma

scolded about the dispatch," she quickly added, skipping the unpleasant situation in her story, glibly; "but she nevertheless ordered my trunks to be packed at once—right there in the dining-room, under her supervison—then Minna and grandmamma's vinegar-faced maid dragged nearly everything in the dressing-room to the front—and, heavens! what a time there was! The stage-dresses were piled up mountain high, until grandmamma and her *fauteuil* disappeared on the other side, and nothing was to be seen of her but the yellow bow on her cap, that nodded and wriggled whenever she scolded or issued orders. Oh, Felix! how tempting those loads and loads of pretty things, that mamma had prepared for my stage wardrobe, looked, but when they fetched the Giselle costume in which I was to make my *début*—oh, it is simply irresistible!—I—I—began to cry. Now don't speak—am I not over head and ears in love with you? So what did I do, but swallow my tears and laugh in my sleeve at Madame Lazare, *née* De Rougerole, who was just then saying to my Minna, 'Don't you forget yourself, girl, and walk familiarly beside Mademoiselle Fournier while conducting her to the cars! You are to remain respectfully distant, and God grant I may not have to hear from those gossiping Vienna people that my grandchild traveled with but one attendant!' Ha, ha, ha! those Vienna people! And I had already determined to go to my darling—and here I am! Minna is at the hotel with bag and baggage, frightened nearly out of her wits, in fear of mamma and grandmamma. Will you send for her, Felix?"

He started as if the roof had suddenly caved in. The frightful reality stared him in the face again.

"No, she must not come here; neither is this a place for you, Lucille."

She gave a glance at the surroundings as he spoke, and clapped her hands in gleeful astonishment.

"Why, Felix, you must have got into your mother's linen room!" she exclaimed. "To tell you the truth, I'm not anxious to stay here either," she added, peering timidly toward the darkly arched door, where the shadowless darkness had gathered. "I've always been a little afraid of the Cloister estate. When you have been speaking of it, I would think of great marble pillars, arched halls and fountains—and now I am directed to this abominable nest with the declaration it is the Cloister estate. And, oh, Lord! the *entrée*, I nearly fell over a couple of buckets standing in the hall, that resounded with the squalling of a child, with a voice like a young rooster—the Wolfram hopeful, I suppose? The whole house smelled

of bacon. Bah! bacon! And the superb object that brought me up here—she seemed to be a combination of porter, lackey and house-maid. She met me with an intellectual grin, and patted me on the back so comprehensively—ugh!"

Two little wrinkles appeared on that glistening white forehead, as she added, half in jest, and somewhat solicitously:

"One thing is certain, Felix, we must never let mamma and grandmamma come here. Gracious! what a time there would be; and those unhappy Rougeroles would never get done turning in their graves."

"Be assured, Lucille, mamma and grandmamma shall never have occasion to visit us here," Felix replied with a deep sigh; "come, we will leave here also."

"What, to-night? Without your mamma's—"

"My mother is not prepared to entertain visitors like yourself."

"But, good Lord, I am not so difficult to please! You have said yourself that my appetite was like a bird's—certainly I'd rather be excused from bacon indulgencies—but, Mrs. Wagner, our old cook, says a bit of aspic or mayonnaise, of which I am fond, is always to be found in the *garde-manger* of every genteel household."

He compressed his lips, and without a word took the dainty straw hat from the table and placed it tenderly and carefully on the girl's brown curls.

"Well, as you please," she replied, fastening the hat with a gold pin. "Are we going to the hotel?"

"No, I shall take you to our friend, Baron Arnold, at Schillingscourt."

"Oh, that suits me splendidly, Felix. Baron Schilling is real nice. I like him. Shall I see his wife? I am dying with curiosity to see whether she is pretty—that is of the most importance to me, I'd have you know, sir."

She stood upon her tiptoes while speaking, trying to look into the extremely small looking-glass hanging between the windows, to see whether her hat was on "decently," but gave up the attempt with a dubious smile.

"Grandmamma was well acquainted with the papa of Baroness Schilling. She declared the young lady had been immured in a convent up to the time of her marriage."

"Your grandmamma was right," Felix said, drawing Lucille's veil over her face, until nothing of the pure, fair complexion was to be seen, and only the great glowing eyes shone like stars through the lace.

"Now we are ready, I guess," said she, reaching for her handkerchief on the table.

Felix offered her his arm.

"My darling," he paused for an instant under the arch of the door as he spoke, "do not speak until we are out of the house, and let us make as little noise as possible in going downstairs."

"And why, pray? We are not burglars, are we?" she queried, in surprise. "Oh, I recollect—the child; is it sick?"

"No, dear, but very nervous."

"Ah! I understand."

They passed into the hall. It would be impossible to describe the young man's emotions; his hands were spasmodically clutched, and his soul was prayerfully burdened with the hope that no detaining accident would bring Lucille and his mother face to face.

CHAPTER V.

It had become quite dark. A ray from the kitchen lamp fell upon the balusters with just sufficient light to display their horridly carved figures, and show through the open door the big black flue of a gaping fire-place in the background of a dungeon-like dark apartment they were obliged to pass.

"Great fathers, Felix! how can you live in this witch's den!" Lucille whispered close to his ear, closing her eyes in terror. He pressed her arm in silence. His step was almost as light as that of his companion, but the boards sighed and creaked under his feet; but to his infinite satisfaction, he saw that the front hall was empty, and none of the doors open. In a moment he would be released from this perplexing situation.

But in that moment a dark object sprung suddenly, tiger-like, from a dark corner, and swept with awful rapidity past Lucille, and disappeared on the floor above. It was the great house cat who had been disturbed in his favorite nook while taking his evening nap. Lucille gave one shrill scream, and, tearing herself from Felix's arm, ran like mad down the stairs.

Several doors opened at once. In one appeared the nurse with her charge, a couple of milkmaids' heads appeared at the kitchen door, and on the threshold of the senator's room stood Mrs. Lucian with the light of a lamp shining full upon her.

"What is the matter?" she inquired, in her usual imperious tones.

Felix had rushed after Lucille, and now held the trembling girl in his arms.

"Compose yourself, dear; how can you be so terrified by a cat?"

"A cat—oh! You can't make me believe that!" she brokenly retorted, almost crying with vexation. "This abominable cloister! I tell you it is the spirit of some old monk trying to scare me to death!"

The kitchen-maids giggled, and the nurse approached boldly to get a better view of the frightened lady; this encouraged the other servants to do the same. But such impudent behavior was more than Mrs. Lucian could endure. With swift step she approached the women, pushed them into the kitchen and closed the door. "And you go back where you belong, Trine!" and without more ado she took the brazenly unbudging female by the shoulders, and marched her back to the room she had left, and thus cleared the hall.

"Now, make an end to this scandal!" She looked at her son, and pointed to the front door.

Then only Felix observed the deathly pallor of her face, that seemed to have petrified with an expression of pain and wrath. It shocked him to the heart's core.

"Mamma!" he cried, pleadingly.

"What, Felix, is that your mamma?" asked Lucille, disengaging herself from his arms, and looking with great, surprised eyes at the woman, over whose white brow a magnificent brown braid of hair formed a diadem, who was dressed elegantly, and whose bearing was as queenly as she was beautiful. "Why, Felix, I am quite angry with you for never telling me what a pretty mamma you have. I always fancied you with a humped back, and a monstrous cap on your head"—a ripple of laughter accompanied the words—she had forgotten the phantom monk. "Why, you look very different: quite presentable, and stylish even, and here Felix has just been trying to make me believe you were not prepared to entertain a visitor like me."

"He has told you strickly true, miss," the lady replied, icily, and turning from her abruptly, she said to her son, with a meaning inclination of the head toward Lucille: "There, you have an illustration of what I told you to-day. I was tempted to use my prerogative in no gentle manner, when informed of the presence of an uninvited guest in my room, but I thought that a man with any sense of honor, who places a proper value upon the proprieties of life, and thinks a woman's reputation ought to be above reproach, would surely have his

eyes opened by such unprecedented boldness. It's to be hoped you are permanently cured now. Go; and if you return to me *alone* then all will be forgiven and forgotten."

The last words were spoken excitedly, and the commanding voice had in it a ring that was not familiar to Felix—the pleading accents of an anxious mother's heart.

In the meantime Lucille had vainly tried to remove her veil, but the golden net-pin had caught it and held her face prisoner. She felt a burning desire to let this imperious woman, with her solemn, serious visage, see how pretty she was; and thus engaged she paid but little heed to the harsh words uttered, and had she heard them she would not have comprehended their nature. How was she, the petted, the idolized, before whom the aristocratic guests at her mother's house bent the knee; she, the favorite of fortune, at whose bidding everybody moved, whose very dreams were guarded and colored by the pink satin drapery of her couch at home—how was she to understand that she had met with failure and humiliation here in this common country-house, among such mean surroundings? But when Mrs. Lucian spoke of pardoning Felix she suddenly ceased to trouble the resisting veil, and placing her hand lovingly in her companion's arm, nestled close to his tall form like some fond kitten.

"What crime has my Felix been guilty of that you are willing to forgive and forget?" she asked. "And he is to return alone? That is not possible, madame. He is going to take me to Schillingscourt; and you ought to know that I can't be left alone there in a strange house." Here the supercilious blood of the spoiled little beauty betrayed itself in the erection of her lovely curly head. "And I will not have it either, because time is precious, and we must be married at once—no matter in what church, whether here or in England, so that it is done, and we can present ourselves to mamma as man and wife. Then her objections will come too late."

A coarse roar of laughter caused her to start affrighted. She had not observed the senator, who had witnessed the scene from his room, with intense interest, and now made his appearance. With one foot on the door-sill, his arms crossed upon his breast the expression of the echoing laughter still upon his slender but intellectual face, he stood there, preeminently diabolical, as if he were laughing to scorn the folly of all creation.

"Come, come, let us go," said Lucille, clinging to Felix's arm, but Mrs. Lucian motioned for her to wait. The action

was quiet and commanding, but the flashing eyes told of an inward storm.

"I have one question to ask," said she, as if it was painful to conquer her aversion long enough to speak to the girl; "is this ignorance affected, or do you really believe that Madame Fournier is the only one who has the right to object?"

"And pray who else?" was Lucille's astounding query. "Papa and mamma are legally separated, and Monsieur Fournier has no claims upon me at all; besides, I should not obey him—he does not deserve consideration—he deserted mamma."

"Classically dramatic naïveté!" came sarcastically from the senator's room, but Mrs. Lucian turned away as if this dainty, sylph-like creature had struck her in the face with her little fist.

"Forgive, mamma, and farewell!" Felix exclaimed, in trembling tones, but determined. He feared another moment's delay would result in a more calamitous parting.

"Well, Mr. Attorney, sailing direct into matrimony?"

Felix paid no attention to the mocking of his uncle; with a sad smile the extended hand his mother had ignored was withdrawn.

"Look at me!" she commanded. This "look at me!" was the form of coaxing used when called to account for poetry-writing and indulging in the forbidden glory of "play-acting" with other boys in the old days at Schillingscourt, and the phrase comes involuntarily to her lips now. "Look at me, Felix, and ask yourself whether you would dare to ask me—*me* to receive as your wife a woman who—"

"Stop, mamma! I will not have a hair of her head wronged, nor subject her to insults that would poison her innocent heart." Felix spoke earnestly, and laid his hand protectingly upon her curly head, as she leaned against him, casting frightened glances into the senator's gloomy room.

Mrs. Lucian started. A mother's natural jealousy was mingled with the wounded self-love of a selfish nature that demanded of her son "Thou shalt have no other God but me." It was no longer the "dancing-woman's child" she persecuted, but the womanly being resting on her son's bosom. Heretofore she had never thought of the effect a son's choice might have upon her. And now her soul made war and stormed furiously, and she knew that every crack and door had a listener—that every key-hole was covered by inquisitive eyes, and still she let her anger have its say, knowing that every word would be carried abroad by to-morrow on the gossiping tongues of the servants.

"This is gratitude!" she cried, with quivering lips. "This is the way a mother is forsaken. With such an example, a woman may well wish her child had never been born! Was it for this I watched over you in sickness, and had the trouble and care of bringing you to manhood? To sacrifice myself, and then be put aside for the first creature, barely out of short clothes, that comes along! If there is one spark of gratitude or justice in your heart you will cling to me—I want no daughter!"

Felix gazed at his indignant mother in surprise. This sudden outburst of rage, her ungenerous reproaches, and the manner in which she lay claim to him, body and soul, reminded him of his lost father. The boundless egotism of this woman must have caused the separation. This conviction stilled his power of resistance.

"Your appeal to my duty as a son is harder to resist than if you had asked me to show my gratitude by having my eyes put out."

"All talk!" she cried out.

"Can you expect me to choose between you, when it has long since been decided?" Felix continued, as if the mocking slur had not been uttered. "Lucille has placed herself under my protection, and before God and man it has become my duty to stand by her. Or would you have me become a scoundrel, who cast out a loving, trusting girl, and purchased thereby the privilege of a mother's roof for himself? Mother!" he added, pleadingly, "if you refuse to receive her, you lose your son."

"Better no child than a degenerate one."

"Why, Felix, how can you submit to such abuse?" Lucille exclaimed, no longer clinging helplessly to her protector's arm, but head crested, resolute, and on the defensive. "Madame, you are a heartless woman."

"Lucille!" The young man endeavored to draw her to him, to quiet her.

"No, Felix—let me speak!" she said, pushing his hands away. "It is really too funny—incredible almost; but I see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears, so it must be true. Madame, you absolutely act as if I ought to feel myself highly honored to be received here! Great heavens! In this house! Why, if you offered me the treasures of the universe I would not stay with you!" She pulled her hat savagely over her face, thus causing the diamond bracelets to glisten and sparkle in the lamp-light. "You called me a *creature* just now. Really, madame, but such language is never used in

my home, not to the meanest dish-washers. Thank the good Lord my grandmamma does not see me in this situation; I fancy she would soon give you to understand who was the condescending party."

Mrs. Lucian stared at the girl in speechless amazement, the senator burst into a loud laugh.

"Oh, laugh, sir, if it affords you pleasure," the young lady retorted, "but Mrs. Lucian is nevertheless the loser. Felix belongs to me, we shall never be parted again."

"Hush, Lucille," Felix said, drawing her arm firmly through his own. "Mamma, you have provoked this somewhat inelegant attack by your unkind treatment."

"Then let her go, this theater princess!"

"Not without me—come, my child."

Mrs. Lucian lifted her arms, and her glance rested on her brother as if seeking help there.

"Let 'em go! no loss to you; they are not worth a charge of gunpowder, either of 'em!" was the brutal and scornful advice of the senator.

She stepped back and cleared the way, as if the coarse verdict had restored her senses, and with them the cold, unfeeling exterior. Pointing sternly to the door, she said:

"Go where and with whom you please, but be sure and make the distance between us wide. For I never wish to see you again. Never! not even after death. Away with you!" Without looking back she hastened up the stairs, and the door to the senator's room was shut with a bang.

"Thank God we have got the murderous den behind us," Lucille exclaimed, as Felix led her, mute and breathing heavily, through the yard toward the gate. Her childishly ringing voice still trembled with anger, and her little hand was clinched threateningly, but the next instant she had cowered close to Felix again—for they were not yet out of the "murderous den"—and the skeleton arm of some expiating monk might reach them and lay his cold hand upon her neck. Between them and the open street stood that dark wall, and on either side crouched shadowy figures beneath the trees. The glistening rivulet ran its course from the well-spring like a knife flashing and cutting along the earth. Lucille even fancied she heard whispering among the trees; then the little portal clattered and rattled shut, and she breathed freely as she halted for a moment in the open street.

"Ugh! What abominable people!" she exclaimed with relief, and, as if determined to dispose of the disagreeable im-

pression with the cloister dust clinging to her garments, she gave her willowy figure a vigorous shake.

"Poor Felix, you have been brought up in a regular house of correction," she added, dubiously sympathetic. "Nice relations—excuse me for saying so. She calls herself mother, and that horrid being, who, like Samuel in 'Freischutz,' laughed so Satan-like between the scenes—"

"It's my uncle, Lucille," Felix interposed, impressively, but in a voice still unsteady with excitement.

"Oh, fudge!" she retorted, impatiently; "I'm much obliged to you for such an uncle! You are entirely too good-natured, Felix. You have let them domineer over you all your life, and now they won't even let you get married. Your lady-mamma expects you to establish yourself as bachelor in the house, and for the rest of your natural life devote yourself to holding her yarn and help clean vegetables. Ah, my lady, that's the time you reckoned without—me! What a proud woman she is; probably because she is still handsome. Bah, what's the good at her age! For she is old—old as mamma, and she has been covering the wrinkles in her skin with the powder-puff this long time. The principal thing in life is to be young—and we are young, aren't we, Felix? and that is what makes the old people mad."

He did not answer. The silvery tones with their roguish chatter, that usually held him enchained as if they were sweetest melodies, had no power to arouse him from the profound sorrow occasioned by the distressing scene between himself and mother, and the perplexing question, what to do next.

The rain began to fall, and the first lamps at the end of the street had just been lighted; but through the darkness, the winding paths, the great beds of glowing peonys bordering the lawn, the beautiful fountain with its silver sprays, could be seen behind the iron railings inclosing the façade of the Italian house, Schillingscourt.

The *entrée* here was a little different from that at the Cloister House. The aristocratic quiet and elegance of a Venetian villa or Florentine palace reigned here. The iron gate turned silently on its hinges, the singing of the fountain waters, and the pattering of the rain-drops on the leaves could be distinctly heard, as the sound was broken by the trail of Lucille's dress sweeping over the graveled path.

The young lady felt herself once more in her native element. The silent man at her side walked too slow; she could have down in her eagerness to touch a carpeted floor and inhale re-

fined air again. When suddenly her footsteps slipped. Under a group of silver-leafed firs cowered a little girl.

"What are you doing there, child?" Lucille asked.

There was no reply.

Felix bent over the little thing, who retreated still into the shrub, and recognized Adam's little daughter.

"Is that you, Henna? Is your father back again?"

"I don't know," was the mournful, tear-choked answer.

"Did he fetch you here?"

"No, I ran away." The heavy breathing and sobbing continued. "Grandmother don't understand. She says I'm foolish and wicked to think such things about my father."

"What things, child?" Lucille asked.

The girl sobbed aloud, but did not answer.

"Well, Henna, your grandmother may know best," Felix remarked, consolingly. "Has your father gone out?"

"Yes, and he was so red—grandmother scolded him because he was sent away from here—then he only said he had a headache, and was going to the drug-store to get something for it. And I wanted to go along"—she began to cry still more piteously—"and then—grandmother—she wouldn't let me, and—and got mad and took away my shoes and stockings," she concluded, with a wail.

"And you ran away in disobedience, and bare-footed?" asked Felix.

"I only went to the drug-store," said she, evading the direct question, and trying to hide her feet under the short dress; "but they said father hadn't been there at all."

"He very likely went to some other one, then; so you had better go home, Henna. He may be there now, wondering where you are."

The child turned her face angrily away, but never moved. These people were like her grandmother, they "didn't understand" either, and now they questioned and bothered her. "The porter always comes by here at this time," she said, in tones betraying obstinate determination. "He liked my father and will help me find him."

"But it is going to storm—see, it is raining now," Lucille exclaimed, laughing, as the girl maintained her position and quietly wrapped her apron around her bare arms. "What a stubborn little thing it is! Here, wrap this around you," said she, throwing down a crêpe de Chine shawl she had carelessly worn across her left shoulder; but the girl, without touching it, merely glanced at the expensive soft white drapery partly covering her little red frock and spread over the gravel path

where the rain-drops were already sprinkling it. Lucille gathered up her dress and ran toward the house, laughingly declaring she had no intention to appear at Schillingscourt as a dripping sea nymph.

CHAPTER VI.

FELIX rang the bell. The great arched door opened noiselessly. Formerly the hall was lighted by the simple flame of a plain oil lamp with its glass globe, the rays barely strong enough to reach the entrance of the side corridors or reflecting the highly polished mosaic floor, but this evening he was dazzled by the glare of light from the tulip globes of the superb chandelier held and supported by solemnly beautiful female faces; and solemnly dignified sounded the echoing steps of the servant. Felix hesitated a moment. The necessarily plain but cheerful household arrangement that had attracted him to Schillingscourt had been utterly changed, and assumed the aristocratic air that belonged to the pristine barons of Schillingscourt.

"Is Baron Arnold von Schilling at home?"

"Yes, Felix!" came in ringing masculine tones from an opening door, but the speaker started back in alarm as Lucille bounded toward him.

"Oh, *cher* baron, what a comical face you put on!" she laughed. "Just like Felix; he stood staring at me, too—like Lot's wife."

Her voice resounded from the polished marble walls like flute notes—and again she began to tug at the obstinately clinging veil, patting her foot emphatically in the meanwhile. "There!" off it came in tatters, and the charming face with its piquant expression appeared fresh and sweet as a tea-rosebud.

"I have no 'regards' to deliver from mamma and grandmamma, for"—she placed her hand over her mouth—those re-echoing walls must not be told of that naughty trick—"I have run away, be pleased to know."

Baron Schilling gazed with questioning perplexity over her head into his friend's pale and troubled face.

"Can I speak to you and your father alone for half an hour?" Felix asked, in a hurried and oppressed manner.

"Come, papa is in his room," said Arnold, turning to lead the way to his father's apartments.

Felix hesitated. "Will you not take Lucille to your wife first?"

"To my wife?"—the question contained surprise and embarrassment, but quickly resolved, he added: "To please you, yes, Felix—come."

Lucille tucked the remains of her veil into her pocket, shook back her curls, and placed her hand confidingly within the baron's offered arm. He led them toward the corridor—or rather gallery, from its expansive dimensions so entitled—to the left and southern side of the house, where a broad, elegant winding stairway led to the second-floor. Between the arched windows that opened like doors to the floor were deep niches, wherein Pater Ambrosius, the Benedictine monk, had placed, with æsthetic rapture, undraped marble statues of Grecian deities. Later the idea had been completed, when the imposing arch leading into the cloister had been walled up and before it was placed a marble group. Behind these marble bodies, on the other side of the wall, were ranged those boards on which stood the tin box containing the dairy receipts. Lucille skimmed past these figures and goddesses as if she were winged. She felt as if she were going through the aisles and galleries of a grand opera house, and Felix thought how, but a short time ago, he had been cast out from home into a dark and uncertain existence, into which he was dragging this child of luxury, this elfish little mortal that he worshiped so.

Baron Schilling directed his steps toward the so-called "family-room" at the end of the gallery. It had ever been the favorite resort of the old baron's, and notwithstanding its salon-like immensity, had a cozy, cheerful air; the open rafters overhead were curiously carved, and the wooden landscape carving on the walls reached the ceiling, and left but little of the gray-tinted original wall, like deep-seated panels, between them. These carvings were in relief, and lay like artistically connected arabesques upon a smooth background. They were considered valuable works of art and carefully guarded.

The old baron had studied his comfort more than the originality of the room in fitting it up. He had hung a few game-pieces on the walls between the carvings, and supplied it with a set of comfortably upholstered modern furniture. But with the advent of the new mistress at Schillingscourt this had also been changed. The bare spaces in the wall had been frescoed; high-backed chairs and fancy ottomans, cushioned in pale-green silver-carded silk; the windows were draped with the same material, over which flowed soft curtains of ancient Netherland lace, the pattern beautifully brought out by the green brocade under it. But on each side of the door stood high-backed sideboards, displaying the family treasures. They

spoke loudly of the wealth the young wife had brought to the Schillings. They were so loaded down with gold and silver plate and cut-glass ware that even the table-ware that the wealthy Benedictine abbé set before his princely guests would have been cast into the shade in comparison.

From one of the rafters was suspended a dimly burning lamp that shed a soft light over the apartment; but on the little table, beside which the young wife was seated, stood a globe lamp, the light of which fell full upon her blonde head as she bent over her sewing.

Lucille's lips curled disdainfully, for the face that was lifted and turned toward them now was the most expressionless she had ever seen. Her hair was gray, blonde and gray her complexion, not a graceful curve in the long, thin face—and this lady was said to be not twenty years old.

"Clementine, dear, this is my friend, Felix Lucian, and his *fiancée*, Mademoiselle Fournier, from Berlin," said the young baron, with a peculiar, to him, polite nonchalance. "I place the young lady in your charge while we call on papa in his room."

The baroness partly rose and acknowledged the introduction with a slight bow. Her blonde-fringed eyes rested a moment on the charming face of the young girl, then the cold smile vanished from her lips, and, sinking back in her chair, she motioned for Lucille to take an ottoman standing near.

Baron Schilling stooped to pick up a portfolio lying on the carpet, and, with a flushing face, collected some leaves belonging to it, scattered about the floor.

"I see my sketches have found no favor in your eyes," he remarked, replacing the leaves.

"Pardon! The absorbing study required to catch your ideas makes me nervous when I am alone." Her voice was not unpleasant, but just now there was reproach in it. "I am unable to understand them at all, unless you are by to explain."

"Or perhaps if I write under them, like another unfortunate bungler heard of, 'This is a hen,'" laughed the baron, evidently amused. "Do you see, Felix, how effective my designs are? Yet you always insisted I possessed talent. But let us be going if you would see papa before tea."

On leaving the room Felix cast an anxious glance upon his darling, who, in the unmistakable triumph of beauty, sat unconcerned beside the singularly shadowy woman that was so coldly reserved. Lucille was coolly removing her hat, and the

other lady reached for her embroidery with her long, ivory-like fingers.

"Permit me, madame," said Lucille, flinging her hat toward a neighboring ottoman.

The baroness watched with polite astonishment as the long-plumed article described a circle in the air and landed on the floor. At this moment there was a rustling of one of the brocade window-curtains, and a little monkey slipped out and grabbed the hat.

Lucille gave a little shriek. The creature looked like some black imp.

"Come here, Minka," the baroness commanded, with threatening finger. Minka held the hat over her head with both arms and obeyed her mistress. This was too much for Lucille's risibility. She forgot her fright and began to laugh like a merry child; but not a feature in the ashen-colored face beside her moved.

"I am sorry the animal frightened you," she said, placing the hat on the table before the girl. "My husband dislikes Minka, and she knows it, and generally hides while he is in the room."

"Oh, a little scare like that don't affect me. I am young and healthy; not nervous like mamma," was the hearty reply, as Lucille tried to coax the monkey to her.

Yes, young, healthy and bewitchingly lovely was the young girl the gray eyes of the baroness were covertly watching.

"I was far more alarmed at the Cloister House awhile ago, when a monstrous thing sprung past me in the dark—Felix declared it was a cat."

"You are a visitor at the Cloister estate?"

"God *forbid!*" Lucille exclaimed, with protesting hands. "It makes my blood curdle even to think of being obliged to stay in such a place overnight! Have you ever been over?"

The baroness shook her head. "I am not in the habit of cultivating neighborly intercourse."

"Then certainly you can form no idea of the place. It's a puzzle to me how Felix has endured living in those rooms, among furniture that must have been made in the year one, that our servants wouldn't have as a gift. I suppose the bed-clothes are coarse enough to match. Oh, what a dear little thing it is!" she exclaimed, as the monkey jumped into her lap and wound its arms around her neck in an almost human manner; then she took off one of her elegant bracelets and fastened it about the monkey's thin neck, pinned her lace handkerchief across its shoulders, and laughed like mad when

the little creature bounded to the floor and began tearing the lace with its teeth and clawing at its unaccustomed necklace savagely.

With displeasure displayed in look and manner, the baroness removed the articles from the struggling creature, and placing the bracelet beside the hat on the table, said: "I fear it is ruined."

"Pshaw! what of it? It is a present from Prince Kousky, and I can't bear him!"

The baroness looked up startled. "I am acquainted with Prince Kousky. Does he visit your parents often?"

"Oh, yes, he comes daily—to see mamma—for papa lives in Petersburg. *Le grande mère* dotes on him, because his presence adds luster to our receptions. But mamma don't care much for him, he is such an old fop, you know. He feeds me like a baby, with bonbons, and he smothers mamma with flowers literally—mornings after the entertainment."

"When?" queried the baroness, as if she had not heard aright.

"Good heavens!—after the entertainment. Don't you know? Didn't my name strike you?" Lucille asked, merrily, "or have you never been to Berlin?"

"I have been there."

"Then it seems incredible that you should not know, mamma, the celebrated *danseuse* Manon Fournier—"

"Indeed!" was the laconic word that cut short the lively speech. As the baroness quickly folded her work, a slight color rose to her cheeks, and she avoided Lucille's eyes. "I rarely visit the theater," said she, going to the table that stood under the hanging lamp, prepared for supper, and glittering with its tea-table splendor.

"Heavens, the length of her!" was the astounded expression of Lucille's glance as it followed the movements of the tall angular figure. The comfortable dust-colored house-dress bagged over the flat bosom, and swept from the narrow round shoulders down to the floor in a long train behind. But notwithstanding her long arms and languid manner, she presided with graceful elegance at the table. She lighted the alcohol burner under the silver tea-pot, and carefully counted the cups before her, measuring guardedly the exact quantity required for each cup, but not another look did she deign to cast upon the young girl.

"That is my duty at home, generally," the chatty young lady gossiped, while playing with the again reconciled Minka.

"Everybody praises my tea but Baron Schilling; he is the most difficult of all tea-drinkers to please."

The gray-blonde head was suddenly erected.

"Was my husband a frequenter at your house?"

"Oh, my, yes! Didn't you know it? Felix always said the baron found his subjects for artistic study in mamma's parlors. We have a great many pretty and interesting lady friends—he painted mamma's picture—"

"Did you say he painted the Dancer Fournier?"

A light began to dawn in Miss Lucille's mind. The woman's voice indicated something of the sensation raging in that sunken breast—the cutting contempt with which the words "Dancer Fournier" were spoken; and the dishes began to clatter under those long hands as if the next movement would hurl them to the floor. The idea of that cadaverously hateful person being jealous! Lucille's eyes scintillated green and sparkled with mischief not unmixed with malice. She rose, smilingly smoothed the folds of her dress, and approached the table, causing the unapproachable cold baroness to sink further back in her chair.

"Is it, then, anything remarkable that Baron Schilling should want to paint a pretty woman?" Lucille asked, showing the glistening little teeth between the laughing rosy lips. "They say mamma is highly distinguished looking. She is neither colorless blonde, nor tall and angular. Her hair is superbly black, and her arms and neck are celebrated among artists for their perfect outlines. Baron Schilling did not paint her in one of her own characters, but as Desdemona. Oh! it is simply soul-thrilling to see the way the white satin falls away from one shoulder as the arm is lifted from the harp."

She paused as she thought of the disdainful manner in which the portfolio of sketches had been thrown aside. It suggested an idea; then she continued with inward delight as she noted the growing uneasiness of the baroness:

"Baron Schilling paints beautifully. Professor W—— says he is no dilettante. He possesses talents that will make him famous."

The baroness leaned back in her chair silently, her eyes covered with one hand. She was certainly an obstinate, nervous being, an only child, indulged by a doting father, and petted and humored as a wealthy heiress by the sisters in her convent school. Lucille, in the consciousness of her perfect health and beauty, looked down upon the weakly, unlovely woman whose thin lips never smiled, with contempt. What did this

disagreeable person want in the world? She ought to have remained comfortably immured in her convent and taken the veil.

The silence was oppressive—the steaming tea-pot began to sing, and the rain beat down outside. Lucille parted the window-curtain to look out, and did not observe the angry gray eyes that followed her movement. She was growing impatient and vexed with Felix, for leaving her alone so long with the unsocial mistress of Schillingscourt, whose dress was buttoned so closely to the throat under the closely compressed mouth. Just as she parted the curtains, a blinding flash of lightning quivered over the parterre and filled the room, encircled the lamp globe, followed by a terrible clap of thunder that made the earth tremble, and brought the rain down in streams, beating against the windows as if it were going to tear the panes out and swamp the house.

The baronesss started up, trembling in every limb, and rang the table-bell furiously. A servant entered.

"Request the gentlemen to come to tea at once."

There was no tremor in her voice.

CHAPTER VII.

Masculine footsteps were heard approaching slowly along the corridor. Minka, who had cuddled herself in the folds of her mistress's dress at the sound of thunder, skipped, hurriedly and grimacing, back to her retreat behind the curtain. The hands of the baroness were busy with the tea-pot. Lucille turned from the window. She did not mind the elements, however timidly superstitious she was in regard to shadows and ghosts—the clashing element and fury of nature only "amused" her; the more violent, the better she liked it. Ruin, death and annihilation could not touch her. She remained standing before the curtain. She could not have appeared to better advantage, the pretty curly headed elf, than upon this softly picturesque background of flowing brocade and lace. Baron Krafft von Schilling entered the door held open by a servant, leaning heavily upon Felix Lucian's arm. One leg was lamed from a stroke of paralysis, but he presented a splendid appearance, with his full broad shoulders, and fresh, spirited face glowing with life and mirth.

"Zounds! The little runaway would have been lost, too, Felix," he exclaimed, gazing with undisguised admiration at Lucille, and stroking his mustache. "A charming child—an enchanting little witch!"

This open flattery—the very tones of the clear masculine voice—restored Lucille's good-humor. Like a snow-flake she whirled across the carpet and made the old gentleman a roguish little courtesy.

He looked at her in unbounded delight.

"It has been a long while since Schillingscourt harbored such a rare little bird. It refreshes the sight and heart of an old fellow like myself. Well, you have come to the right nest. We'll see about it—have courage!"

He turned to the tea-table. "Now, do tell, Clementine, why you sent for us in such a hurry; is the house on fire—or did the storm scare you? There's no danger, we have a lightning rod on the house." This was said in a droll and jovial manner, but something in his face protested decidedly against the lady's command.

She poured out the tea, glanced rapidly at the old-fashioned clock opposite, and replied: "It is our supper-time—not a moment sooner."

He drew his gray bushy brows together with a scowl, saying: "Very well, my child, an old soldier like myself appreciates punctuality; but I have never been drilled to obey domestic orders—not even by my wife. And that thing there"—he pointed to the clock—"is not going to tyrannize over me—particularly when I am engaged—understand, young lady?"

Slowly he sunk into a high-backed arm-chair at the table, and motioned Lucille to be seated on an ottoman at his side. Not until then did the baroness touch the bell and order plates for her guests, thus plainly showing her inhospitable intentions.

Baron Schilling sat next to his wife, his father opposite, and father and son resembled each other very much. Like all the Schillings, they were not remarkable for beauty. Up in the middle hall, over the portal of the "Pillar House," hung the portraits of the Schillings, when, in centuries back, they flourished in their ancestral castles. There they presented the heavy red lower lip, the square forehead, and the characteristic German "Schillings' nose." They were strong heads on massive forms, that seemed born to battle and conquer. The two last Schillings belonged to them in every respect, only the bristling, bushy hair of the old baron was nearly white, while his son's hair and beard waved soft and dark-brown as any southerner's. The proudly glowing dark-blue eagle glance in the portraits was repeated in the living; the father's sparkled with passion and humor, roving over all creation; the son's, downcast and introverted.

His wife passed him his tea. He looked into her face an instant; then, taking her hand in his own, he said, tenderly:

"This storm has affected you, Clementine; you are not well?"

She withdrew her hand and set down the cup, turning her head away with aversion.

"I am faint; you have that intolerable paint-and-oil smell of your so-called 'atelier' about you again."

The old gentleman grew dark-red in the face.

"H'm—Clementine, may this despised 'so-called' be defined as 'ridiculous dilletante presumption?'" he asked, sharply, supporting the bent-forward, challenging attitude of his body with a hand on each arm of his chair.

"You misunderstood Clementine, papa. She merely intended to signify my rather mean little work-room at the top of the house, with its hastily improvised sky-light," his son replied, looking fixedly and proudly into his wife's face. She answered the look with a curl of the lip, and shook her head, as if determined not to have an iota of the sense of her words changed. It was astonishing to see how suddenly the limpid, languid manner of this seemingly unenergetic, nun-like being could be transformed in every muscle to obstinate self-will.

"There, Arnold!" laughed the old baron; "now set yourself up again against a woman's prejudice, will you? Oh, my!" he clutched at his hair in comic desperation. "But see, Clementine, I was quite as bad as you about it awhile back. A blockhead, in fact, I wouldn't take any stock in his genius—and what wonder? The Schillings and fine arts belong together about as much as the donkey and the lute, and for that reason I objected to the 'dobbing,' and the poor fellow had to do it on the sly; and now they tell me in Berlin that my son is a genius, with a bright career before him; and I have got to hide my head in shame before the people, and feel like a drenched poodle. Ah, if I had known the stuff my boy had in him things would be different!"

The pale, gray eyes gave him a side glance.

"You think, papa, the last of the Schillings could have been handsomely supported by the paint-brush and pencil?"

"Clementine!" her husband exclaimed, angrily.

"I beg of you, do not speak so loud." She placed her hand over her ear as if the clear voice were distressing to her. She was delicate and nervous and excitable, but she would not be silent. "Confess now, could you subsist on the remuneration people of the—the—*demi-monde* are able to make? For example, what did the 'Desdemona in white satin' bring you?"

The upper lip of the speaker twitched over the long white teeth.

The same characteristic smile that played about the young baron's mouth in the hall awhile ago, appeared again, and he gave Lucille an expressively ironical look. This young lady was literally itching to reward that "long, drawn-out gray person," with a pretty little speech for the "*demi-monde.*"

"That picture brought me long-sought success after many failures, and the happiness of finding a subject from which I could realize my ideal of the doge's unfortunate daughter. Madame Fournier has a magnificent profile, and her self-sacrificing kindness and patience during the long, tedious sittings—"

"Tedious?" exclaimed the baroness, with a hysterical laugh. "It is wrong, Arnold—indeed it results in deceit and distrust, for people to marry without knowing all about each other first, as seems to be the case with us."

The old baron was in the act of breaking an egg, but he paused, his eyes flashed from under their bushy brows, and he lifted his head like some growling lion, ready to roar a terse reprimand, but desisted, on second thought, and gave way to a humorous turn of speech.

"What is that you say? There are things in your past life of which Arnold knows nothing? And what of it, little woman?—marriage is not going into a business partnership, or something of that kind, where one is expected to bring written credentials from one's former associates! You were in a convent until your seventeenth year; but, setting this fact aside, we will take it for granted that there are no improprieties to confess—things were all right in the convent, eh?"

Notwithstanding her cutting and malicious remarks, the baroness had, up to this time, done the honors of the table with dignity—but now she raised her handkerchief to her lips with trembling hand, as if the shock of her father-in-law's rude expressions had caused blood-spitting from which she was ready to faint.

Arnold looked pleadingly reproachful at his father, and took his wife's hand, saying, affectionately:

"You may trust in my past, as you can in the future you are to share with me. In time you will see the necessity there is in my profession to study all phases of humanity, and this will bring me in contact with all grades of society. If the adage, 'The end justifies the means,' applies anywhere, it does in the glorification of art; she seeks her motive in the boudoir and in the garret, and when I find a subject that interests me, I fol-

low it, though it leads me into the haunts of crime. The wife of an artist must expect that, and you will also get accustomed to it."

"No, Arnold; you may as well let such sanguine hopes perish at once!" she replied, with energy. "I was brought up to be truthful and candid. I offer my devotions to pictures of the Virgin, and I remain during the whole of mass, because it is my duty as a good Catholic to do so; but beyond this all that is called painting and music is repugnant to me."

She spoke deliberately, and with downcast eyes, and toyed meanwhile with a corner of the lace on her handkerchief, but the concluding sentence was uttered with an expression of vindictiveness that looked very like a desire to flay the fine-art-loving husband.

"You see, Arnold," she resumed, in the same monotone, "I have the courage to be upright about it, unlike most of my sex, who wouldn't take a step out of their way to see a Raphael or listen to an oratorio if they did not fear the anathema of the art-crazy world. I am no hypocrite. I confess that to my weak sight a painting is merely a daub of colors, sketches bore me, and music irritates my nerves, and I entertain a constitutional antipathy for everything called genius. Then do not think, dear Arnold, that in becoming the wife of Baron Schilling, I imagined I should become the wife of an artist, and I shall not accustom myself to the things you mention."

"We will not quarrel about it," he replied, shortly. But his face was very pale, and his haughty calm proved him to be fully able to maintain his own way without words. The lady seemed startled by the short reply—the tones and decided manner were new to her. She anticipated a different result from her "upright confession."

Felix listened in silence and sorrow to this worthy exchange. Poor Schillingscourt, its peaceful, cozy atmosphere was disturbed indeed—it was radiant once more with ancient glory—but the empty treasury had been filled at a sacrifice of its heart's sunshine, under the brightness of which no one moped and no one scolded—the nightmare of bad temper found no lodgment in its sunny corners. But with all the glare of its present expensive light, the bats and owls of bigotry, pride and malice flourished. On the brow of the would-be sovereign of the human souls under that roof was plainly written: "It all belongs to me!"

Here, also, he found a self-willed woman despot, such as had made him homeless.

Who could have imagined that this cold-faced being with the

nun-like drooping eyelids had maneuvered to win her young husband? During her father's illness the previous year, the old baron and his son had visited the dying relative in Coblentz. When they returned the old gentleman had laughingly told Felix that the heiress was "over head and ears in love with Arnold; that she was willing to give up her intention of retiring to a convent after her father's death, for the sweet purpose of becoming Baroness S——." Then followed her father's demise, that the young lady announced by letter to Baron Krafft, and a regular correspondence followed. The young lady used her pen well, for the old gentleman began to nourish a fervent desire to have her for a daughter. In providing a wife for his son thus, the estates and wealth of the Schillings would also be restored to him. The stroke of apoplexy that prostrated him about this time helped him in the accomplishment of his plans. Arnold submitted. He loved his father tenderly, and standing beside what might be that parent's death-bed, he promised to wed the lady of his father's choice.

Did he love the "tall Coblenz cousin" that became his wife on such short acquaintance? having seen each other only two or three times. Love her! Felix shuddered at the idea of his friend, with his poetical beauty, worshiping nature embracing that living could-souled skeleton. Impossible! But there was not a trace of discontent in his interesting face. He had an iron will; as a lad it never occurred to him to hold others responsible for his acts, not even his father.

But the old baron displayed his disappointment. He was on the war-path with the delicate woman who had duped him so nicely with her fluent pen. He was miserable and repentant for having "destroyed his son's happiness," as he groaned to himself, for he said nothing to Arnold. He dared not send a bomb-shell at the enemy if he didn't want to subject the house to a succession of "nervous attacks"—and he was tired of useless skirmishing—so he was silent.

Pushing back plate and egg cup, after swallowing a few hasty mouthfuls, he took from his pocket a package that he had placed there on leaving his room. His face cleared with evident pleasure as he said:

"See here, Felix, in this parcel we have the solution of your difficulties." He wiped his spectacles and put them on, then opened the paper, disclosing a long, closely written letter and a flat package wrapped in silk. "To sum up, briefly, what you have been telling us means—your mother has disowned, and don't want you even after you are dead. Stuff and nonsense! And that rascally uncle of yours, of course, sig-

the verdict with a thousand blessings. That settles it! Madame Lucian has no more claims on you—and—that removes the seal from my lips."

Bracing himself with both hands on the table, he leaned over and gazed with his fiery blue eyes sharply into the young man's face awhile, then asked:

"Have I ever spoken to you about your father?"

Felix shook his head; he had grown deathly pale, and waited in voiceless expectation.

"Very well! Then I have not!" He leaned back comfortably in his chair again. "I have not been at liberty to do so—though you may believe I have wanted to often enough, and to steal you, as they had stolen you—stolen, I say—and send you secretly across the ocean to your father, where you belonged!"

His fist came down on the table, and set the dishes to dancing, and the nerves of the hostess to quivering, while she collected the salt and tea-spoons that had been scattered.

"But I had given your mother my word that in your presence her husband's name should never be mentioned. I must avoid it, or I should not have been permitted to see you, and without me you would have mourned yourself to death, or grown crabbed-natured—they would have turned your Lucian blood into Wolfram vinegar, and I could not have kept your poor father posted—"

He stopped short. He had observed the effect upon Felix when this subject was broached, but he was not prepared for the intense emotion that burst forth at the sound of his father's name.

He sprung from his chair, and grasping the old baron's hand he pressed it stormily to his bosom, stammering eagerly:

"My father! You know where he is—he is living—he thinks of me!"

"Keep quiet, my impulsive boy," the old gentleman said, as his sympathetic eyes became moist with emotion. "How I wish he could see you now. It would do his soul good. Ah! Felix, he loves his boy as—I love mine." A stolen, sorrowful glance was sent at that "boy," with an awful sigh. "We were companions in youth—we are friends to-day. Lucian was just another such a merry, extravagant fellow as myself, and was more at home in Schillingscourt than with his own people. Poor devil, it would have been better for him had he never seen the place, and that icicle, Teresa Wolfram. Before he left Germany he came secretly to Schillingscourt one night. He was wild to see you, and had concocted all sorts of un-

feasible plans to obtain possession of you and his rights; but he couldn't get around that sly old fox in the cloister yonder, and he had to leave without you. Over the sea he sought a new home and found it. He married a wealthy Spanish lady, and they were living together happily up to the time of her death. Until then his letters were quiet. He evidently loved her dearly, and became reconciled to life in her society; but she is dead, and he is once more in a state of excitement, and longing to see his son." He paused, and shook his head laughingly as he took up the letter. "Singular, isn't it? Yesterday I received this letter. Lucian is in failing health, and like myself in no condition to travel, and he begs most urgently for me to tell him about you and your circumstances. Now, what is the use of wasting words? You bundle up and go to your father, and make America your home in the future."

Felix was walking up and down the floor in a tumult of excitement. Relief, joy, and also sorrow filled his soul in turn. He now remained standing before Lucille, who rose and cast herself impulsively upon his breast.

"Will you go with me, Lucille?"

"Why, of course, you foolish Felix! At once, just as I am. Heavens! an ocean voyage. Why, that is better and jollier than I could have dreamed of. To America it is. To New York, that gay city, of course?"

"No, pretty child; to the south direct—to the rich plantation state, South Carolina. Friend Lucian has become a cotton planter; his father-in-law left him a splendid estate, I believe. Those wealthy planters are said to live in a manner that would make our aristocracy hide its diminished head. Lucian's father-in-law was a Spaniard, from Florida originally, and, according to description, lived in princely style."

With a meaning smile he turned to Felix again. "You see, my boy, you need not be at all troubled about the scoundrelly way you have been fooled out of your mother's inheritance. Your father has been making provisions for you this many a year. Although he can not give you the plantation, for you have a sister—see!"—he unfolded the silk-draped package, and gave Felix a porcelain portrait—"it is the thirteen-year-old daughter of his second marriage."

Lucille pressed close to Felix, eagerly curious to see the picture, and Baron Arnold approached for the same purpose. Only the pale hostess remained unmoved, balancing a teaspoon upon the end of her finger. Were it not for the sudden flush upon her cheeks one would have supposed she were both deaf and blind to the scene.

"Is she not a beauty, this little Mercedes?" the old gentleman asked.

"This is not a little girl!" Lucille exclaimed. "You say she is only thirteen, but she looks as haughty and serious as a learned professor! Look out, Felix, I'm jealous!" she added, poutingly. "Shall you love her?"

"Certainly, Lucille, although she may not love me. Her features are cold and proud."

"Aren't they? And she is humpbacked, you may be assured. Any one with a pretty figure would have more than simply the head painted; I'll wager my little finger on that! Why, this looks as if the head had been decapitated in that mass of clouds."

"No; it appears to float in them with angelic beauty," Baron Schilling remarked, without removing his delighted gaze from the portrait. "It is a masterpiece, a most artistic gem."

"It was painted by an old artist and friend of Lucian's," Baron Krafft explained. "I agree with you it is a face to impress a person. It made even an old cripple like me glow with pleasure to look into those splendid eyes. She does not resemble her father at all."

"Nor Felix either," interposed Lucille, with evident satisfaction. "The yellow complexion and awfully thick black hair—"

"And blue-black sparkling eyes are only to be found in the tropics," Baron Arnold quickly added. "What a glorious study that head would be for me!"

"You may keep the picture, Arnold," said his father, as a dark shadow gathered on his face. "Lucian imagines things at Schillingscourt still creep along in their old quiet rut. During his wife's illness our correspondence flagged. Now he writes for you to hang your title and jurisprudence, and come to him; he was dreaming of a happy future for you and Felix. I was to show you Mercedes's picture. Well, you can guess the rest!"

Arnold's face crimsoned painfully and hastily, but gently he replaced the portrait in its wrap. A hand was laid heavily upon his arm, his wife glided from his side after one covert glance at the picture, and went to the little stand for her work.

She remained standing there as if rooted to the spot. The heart-rending cry of a child, so replete with misery that it caused the old baron to spring to his feet, and limp, with the assistance of Felix, to the window from the direction in the garden from which the sound came.

The storm had abated, but the sky still hung lowering over the city. The light from the street lamp in front of the Pillar House lighted up the parterre with its fountain and flower-beds. On the street people were gathered. The murmuring of hushed voices reached wondering listeners at the window. The baroness had seated herself, and resumed her work by the sewing stand. The child's cry had died away, and all was still. In rising so hastily, Baron Krafft had brushed the portrait from the table, and it had fallen noiselessly upon the carpet. The baroness had seen it fall, but it was beneath her dignity to pick it up. Her eyes drooped over the work in hand, the white thread was drawn in and out steadily; only once the glance wavered. Minka came stealing, after a timid reconnaisance, from her retreat, gathered to her bosom the fallen portrait with its silk wrapping, and hurried back to her hiding-place.

Her mistress bent a little lower over the work in hand, that was all. But she had no idea that a pair of bright eyes had watched the proceeding from the window—Lucille, nearly smothered with laughter. This jealous woman, with her hatred of the fine arts, was intensely amusing, and besides, it was no misfortune if that girl in the "tropics" got her yellow face scratched a little.

The people on the sidewalk began to disperse, and the baron closed the window, thinking the cry had been occasioned by some naughty little runaway, overtaken by its mother, and the party returned to the table.

The old baron began to make a search among the dishes and napkins for the picture.

"What the mischief has become of it? Did you put it away, Clementine?"

"I have been engaged with my embroidery," said the baroness, in soft, undisturbed tones, without looking up from her busy needle.

Baron Arnold took the lamp and looked under the table, and on the floor around it, for the missing picture; Felix and Lucille, who bit her lips in the endeavor to keep from laughing, assisting in the search, when the sound of crackling, like the breaking of some brittle object, came from the window. Baron Arnold hastily put down the lamp—the next instant the curtains had parted, and the struggling, yelling Minka was being carried across the room in an iron grip, and flung out of the door.

"Will you never do me the favor of giving that destructive

little beast away, Clementine? It is an annoyance to everybody in the house."

The young wife lifted her head. Two deep lines appeared between the ash-colored eyebrows, and even the thin, compressed lips had become pale now. She touched the table-bell. "The chamber-maid is to take Minka to my room and give her her supper," she said to the answering servant. Then resumed her work as if nothing had occurred.

Baron Krafft's well foot stamped the floor, and an oath was suppressed upon his lips as he manipulated his gray beard savagely. His son gathered up the fragments of the broken portrait. "By the luckiest chance," said he to Felix, "the face has escaped—only the hair is mutilated, and that can be remedied. The soul is in the eyes—the expression will give me food for thought as long as I can hold palette and brush. I shall mend it, and then feel as if I had a right to keep it."

He wrapped the porcelain pieces in the silk, and placed them in his breast pocket.

Lucille looked vexed. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed, crossly. "What a fuss to make about a thirteen-year-old snip of a girl! A nice beginning! If the little crook-back with her gypsy face rules and reigns by the power of her picture, what may her tyrannical flesh embodiment not do? Look out, Felix, there will be war the very first moment, for I'm not going to be put down! Just let her try it!"

With a graceful little spring she went through the motions of scratching out the far-away tyrant's eyes. The action was deliciously vixenish, and the old baron's eyes glowed as he watched the exquisite little creature's roguish performance. "Bravo!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically; and Felix grasped the rosy little hands with rapturous fondness. "I shall be there with you, Lucille," said he, tenderly.

"And friend Lucian will be as little able to resist the charming Puck as his son," the old gentleman laughed. "Well, Felix, when are you going to march?"

"At once, I should say."

"Good! To-morrow afternoon let it be. In the morning we shall make all the necessary preparations. That lamenting female you left at the hotel, Lucille, of course, goes with you."

"And you really intend leaving Germany, Felix, without seeing Lucille's mother?"

"In mercy's name, what are you thinking of, *cher* baron?" Lucille cried, in affright. "You do not know mamma—we should be parted forever should we be seen in Vienna. Mamma is capable of having Felix put under prison bolt and bar.

She would never give her consent—rather would she put me in a convent. Ugh! horrid! Felix, I pray you let us get on board ship at once! Let us not delay an instant!"

"Not an instant, Lucille; rest easy on that score. Do not judge me severely, Arnold; but it can't be helped now. I must hold on to my blessing now that I have her. As soon as we reach America I shall do everything in my power to appease the mother." He turned away, for the reproaching eyes lost none of their severity.

"You can not understand my feelings, for you—"

He would have added, "do not love," but his glance fell on the young wife, who just then rose, pushing her chair back noisily. Indignant and surprised, she had listened to Felix; now she placed a greater distance between them by retiring to one of the cushioned lounges, and, sinking among the silken pillows, leaned her head against the carved wall. With the movement one of her heavy blonde curls escaped its hold and fell over her bosom, but it added no attraction to the odd face. It would have beautified a bright one; here it appeared unnatural. With hands folded in her lap, and half-closed eyes, and mouth curled contemptuously, she settled into repose. Baron Krafft gave her a droll look, and said:

"Arnold, don't disturb the happiness of these children, I implore you. Felix does just right; he has no frog blood in his veins. I should have done the same thing. An imbecile is he who does not grasp happiness when it laughs him challenging in the face! Ring, my son! Have Adam bring champagne."

"Adam, papa? You sent him away this afternoon."

The old gentleman stared a moment, then struck his forehead in recollection.

"Damned affair!" he muttered, fiercely. "I can't get along without him. Has he really gone, the foolish fellow?"

"Yes, father. But you absolutely abused him to-day."

"Bah! shall I handle the wretch who betrays his old master with gloves?"

"I have been talking to Adam," Felix began to intercede; "he was nearly heart-broken. I don't see how you came to fasten your suspicions on him. The trick was too mean, and my uncle—"

"Silence!" roared the old gentleman. "Your uncle is a shark," was the polite addition, as the veins in the speaker's forehead filled angrily. "He robbed me just as he is helping to rob you of your inheritance. How and when he stole my secret it would be hard to tell by looking at him who has

trickery bolstered fist-deep behind the ears, but that he spied and pried the secret from some one, is certain. I shall probably remain in the dark about it the rest of my life. If Mr. Adam has not yet condescended to return, just tell Christian to fetch the champagne," he ordered in a less excited tone.

His son opened the door and gave the order. The sound of many voices in the hall was not observed in the hurried closing of the door, but when a servant entered with waiter and glasses, the murmuring grew louder and more startling.

"What does this mean?" growled the baron; "has the street brawl been carried in-doors?" The glasses rattled on the waiter with the trembling of the hand carrying it. "And what ails you, man? you are pale as a sheet and shake like a sinner. What's up?"

"It's on account of Adam," stammered the man.

"Adam? Is the rascal back?"

"No, sir; it is his little Hanna; she is clinging to Fritz, and won't go home to her grandmother."

"She is right; she belongs with her father here in Schillingscourt. Why don't the rascal come in and announce his return? Tell him to show himself this minute!"

"Oh, sir, they have just dragged him out of the water. It is all over with him."

The old baron fell back in his chair as if struck, and simultaneously the baroness gave a shriek and rushed from her couch into her husband's arms.

"There! There on the wall! There was a knock, and some one sighed fearfully! I felt the icy breath!"

Lucille ran and hid her pretty face on Felix's breast, and covered her ears with her hands with childish dread of hearing the ghostly sounds described.

In the matter of superstition this superficial child of the world and the convent-bred woman harmonized fully.

"You know, Clementine, your hearing is oversensitive," her husband said, but his voice was a trifle unsteady with the shock just sustained. "We frequently hear noises in that hall; the mice travel through it from the Cloister House."

"Oh, no! I know better. It is the unhappy soul"—her thin form twitched spasmodically as she spoke—"of the self-murderer who is doomed to haunt Schillingscourt in expiation of his crime. Arnold, we can't stay here now."

"Clementine, I won't listen to such nonsensical stuff. Convent reminiscences!" her husband said, impatiently, as he freed himself from her clinging arms.

"Did you say Hanna was in the hall?" he asked the servant,

who stood scared out of his wits, with the champagne bottle in his hand.

"Yes, sir; Adam took her to his mother-in-law's house this afternoon before he went away, but she ran away and waited for Fritz, who was troubled about Adam's strange actions, any way, and asked him to help her find her father. They hunted everywhere in that awful rain, and at last, near the old Actien Mill, they saw some men drag him out of the water."

"A crazy trick—a mean trick! I didn't think Adam would serve me so!" muttered the old baron, the robust color all gone out of his face.

"Indeed, he didn't know what he was about," the man pityingly apologized, and respectfully continued: "The miller saw and spoke to him only a moment before, and just because he talked wildly, he and his boy followed him, and were on the spot as he jumped into the water. They had him out in no time; he was not drowned, but the sudden chill in his heated condition caused apoplexy—that killed him."

"Bring the child in here."

The man hesitated. "She is so wet, and barefooted. Mamselle Birkner is crying, and says—"

"Never mind what Mamselle Birkner says; the girl is to come in here."

The servant retired, and directly after the door was opened, and "Mamselle Birkner," the housekeeper for many years at Schillingscourt, came in, pushing the child before her.

Hanna's little red frock clung to her legs dripping wet, her disheveled hair streaming as well, the bare feet covered with mud. Mamselle Birkner's eyes were overflowing with tears, as she led the child forward.

"Go away! go away!" the baroness exclaimed, hysterically, drawing her trail aside for fear the muddy little feet would touch it.

Hanna obeyed the baron's motion for her to draw near, by describing a very respectful circle around the "gracious lady," and remained standing before the old gentleman with tear-swollen, downcast eyes, picking and pulling at her fingers as if she were tearing a flower to pieces.

"You do not want to stay with your grandmother?" Baron Krafft asked, trying to speak steadily, for it was evident that the appearance of the poor little orphan affected him painfully. The child only lifted the heavy eyelids to drop them again, and remained silent.

"No, she is determined not to go and stay with her grandmother," Mamselle Birkner answered for her. "The old

woman came as far as the gate and wanted to force her away, but the girl created such a disturbance Fritz insisted she should not go by force, but now he is afraid he has done wrong by bringing her here—"

"He has done right, tell him." The baron drew the child toward him gently, and lifted her face to his, asking, tenderly: "Is your grandmother unkind, Hanna?"

This sympathetic address melted the mute grief, and she burst into childish lamentations.

"It's her fault! She scolded and scolded him because the gracious master sent him away—and—and—when they carried him—there—she scolded more and shut the door—on him, oh!"

"Stay with us, Hanna; you need not go to her either." Baron Arnold comforted the child.

"Arnold!" exclaimed his wife, starting up. "What would you do?"

"Just what I am going to do, my lady daughter-in-law. The child remains here, and will be brought up at Schillingscourt—there's nothing further to be said about it! Birkner, take charge of her, will you?"

"Oh, how gladly, gracious master!"

"Well, then, get these wet clothes off, and put the poor little thing into a comfortable bed."

The woman went out with Hanna. The baroness rose, trailed slowly across the room, and with a scarcely audible "good-night," retired to her apartments.

The following afternoon the baron's closed carriage left Schillingscourt. The great gate of the Cloister estate was wide open. A dairy-maid was sweeping, and another one was just coming out with a basket of vegetables as the carriage drove by. Felix leaned far out of the coach window and gazed anxiously into the yard.

The women nudged each other and giggled.

"There they go!" one of them said, "and Mrs. Lucian is at the window; she must have seen them, and she can't help but feel bad, for she must have a little heart with all her pride and mulishness. She thinks everything has got to go to suit her. But I tell Christel she feels it, if she don't let on. Last night she kept going from one window to the other half the night through, thinking he would come back without his girl. Her bed wasn't touched this morning."

At the window in the senator's room she stood, clutching at the sill as she stared at the pale face of her son, whose eyes sought vainly for a last glance at his mother. Not a sigh

escaped her; like a statue she stood there. Her brother approached. "He is lost to you now, Teresa. The miserable boy has gone to his good-for-nothing father." She turned upon the speaker as if he had struck her with a dagger, but she did not ask, "How do you know?" She gave him instead a frantic look, and setting her teeth together with a gritting sound, walked out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

It was A. D. 1868. In the course of eight years great events had taken place in two hemispheres. Bloody scenes had been enacted in Schleswig-Holstein and Bohemia; and in the United States the four years of civil war between the North and South had bathed the country in blood. These eight years had been eventful ones for millions of human souls, and also for the exile who left his fatherland one June day in the company of his chosen wife, to seek a home with his new-found father. Eventful also for Schillingscourt, where the senior of the house, Baron Krafft, after a second apoplectic stroke, had closed his merrily flashing eyes forever, and in consequence the Pillar House was frequently deserted, with all its ancient glory. But apparently time had made no change in the Cloister House; it lay there in its retreat as if events had marched by it in disdain.

As of old the people came promptly at six to get their unadulterated "Cloister milk." The same field and dairy hands followed the beaten track of their duties. The poultry and pigeons retained the same form and color, proving that no strange breed had mingled there. Everything from roof to field was as "unchanged," said the neighbors, "as the rusty hat of the senator, and the cold reserved face of Mrs. Lucian;" but they were obliged to confess that the shoulders bearing that haughty head had become sharp and bony, and the thick braids had received a decidedly silver sheen, and that much of the energy had gone out of her motions and presence.

But if there was anything different about the traditional physiognomy of the place to disturb the people, it was the wild boy who came so often bounding out of the little portal with yells to frighten the unsuspecting promenader. Or he would stand in the gate-way and lash at passing children with his long whip, and vary the amusement by stepping on ladies' trains, and give their wraps a sudden jerk, and thumb his nose at them. When he made his appearance in the barn-yard the feathered tribe scattered with terror, and the chained watch-

dog cowered his tail like a cur, and sneaked into his kennel. Even the coarse dairy-maids retreated, for no one was safe when Mosje Guy came along with his vibrating whip or cudgel in hand. There was not much of the hardy physical strength of the Wolfram race in this late arrival. His nervous system was intensely delicate, and he was subject to fits. He had to be carried on pillows until he was eleven months old, and then it required the most expensive strengthening tonics before he was able to stand on his thin little spider legs, and incredibly thin these pedals were still. The dark little face between the protrudingly large ears had not rounded with the years, and the unnaturally bristling thick black hair grew V-shaped down onto his forehead, like his father.

But he had grown very tall and agile for his age; he could climb like a monkey into trees, up the grape-vine leaders to the top of the walls, and scramble along the edge of the roof. He crept through crack and crevices into the hay-lofts and corn-bins. He hunted hidden nests like a rat, and sucked the eggs. He was intelligent far beyond his years, and knew that everybody and everything was afraid of him, and he became a very scourge and kept the house in perpetual dread with his impish tricks.

The senator watched the progress of his son with delight and pride, but what Mrs. Lucian thought of the extraordinary characteristics and habits of this surely genuine Wolfram, no one knew; for she remained silent on this, as well as every other subject that concerned her brother. Only once had she made some censuring remark about the lad's disposition, and the senator replied, snappishly:

"Time is adapting the Wolfram nature to the demand of the age. The season for tread-mill labor and economy is past, the world has no use for capitalists who ride wooden horses, Teresa; it needs men who have the mettle to live up with it, and my son shows the stuff; he was born for the times!"

Since that time she merely attended to the boy's physical welfare, and though anger flashed from her eyes when the servants made some especial complaint, she said nothing, and motioned toward the senator's room, as if justice could be found there.

She grew more and more silent and morose, and her milk-customers declared that it even annoyed her to be obliged to return their short "good-evening." Down-stairs her hands were ever restlessly busy, but when alone in the gable-room, they were folded wearily in her lap.

Sometimes she would sit by the oaken table in the window

for hours and think. During the first years there was a revengeful satisfaction in her face, when she saw that blank space on the wall where the picture of her son used to hang—for it seemed as if she retained but one impression of him all this time, and that was the moment when the veiled girl had triumphed over her. Latterly she no longer looked up at the spot; her eyes avoided it when they wandered aimlessly into the distance and gazed for hours idly upon a landscape she did not see: this woman who formerly considered every moment thus spent so much money lost! She would not look upon the neighboring building either. She was well aware that her son remained in Schillingscourt that night, and had there been strengthened in his opposition to her.

There was no intercourse between the families whatever. Not even the old baron's death had been announced at the Cloister House. On one occasion Baron Schilling had met her with the intention of speaking. She had—something that rarely happened—been to church; and she walked some distance in silence, after he joined her on the way home, listening to his remarks, preparatory to handing her a letter he had received from Felix. She then changed color, and lifting her head, until it seemed to the baron she had grown several inches, and giving him an annihilating look, she said, with chilling politeness: "I really do not understand whom you are talking about, nor why I should read a letter; I am not in correspondence with any one." He declared he would never make another attempt to enlighten this "icicle," as his father had called her.

Thus she never discovered whither her son had gone, nor that his father had received the young couple with open arms and at once surrounded them with all that princely wealth could furnish—and well for her that she did not know it; she would have died with disappointed revenge, and perhaps with maternal sorrow. Neither was she aware that the civil war in America raged with greatest fury in the Southern States, and devasted also the wealthy State of South Carolina, and that the planter aristocracy, under whose banner Major Lucian stood, had to retreat fighting from their own ground, step by step, until finally they were defeated.

Perhaps, if she had known of the death of the man whose name she bore, it would have had a salutary effect upon the heart of the woman, for with the close of a human life the spectacles through which we have followed the persecuting object are usually broken by the little word "Dead," and the flames of hatred perish like the red clay of metal when it is cast

into water. But she did not know that he had perished in the secession struggle, and continued to think of the adage, "A father's blessing builds what a mother's curse destroys." With satisfaction she harbored such thoughts, while her unfortunate son lay dying from wounds received in defending his hearth and home.

His name was never mentioned on the Cloister estate; but in Schillingscourt they received frequent news from America, at first glowing descriptions and enthusiastic hopes, but as early as 1861 the shadows fell ominously upon the paper. Then all was silent until 1865, when the war was at an end, and they received a letter from Felix, telling of his father's death and of his desolated and devastated home, and his own wounds, from which he could not recover. This was the letter rejected by Mrs. Lucian. Then the former correspondence was renewed, for Baron Schilling was and remained a true, sincere friend to the exile.

Baron Arnold von Schilling's life had flowed on, with the exception of his father's death, smoothly. Steadily his name had become famous throughout Germany and far beyond the borders. His talents were to him an unexpected mine of wealth, and as the old gentleman remarked bitterly, shortly before his death, "made the good-for-nothing, unfatherly sacrifice of boor Isaac" wholly uncalled for.

The baron lived almost entirely devoted to his art. He had built him a beautiful atelier in the garden of Schillingscourt, but it was frequently deserted. He traveled in Italy and France, and rather favored Scandinavia, and carried his ideas and sketches for completion upon the ground they originated from. But wherever he appeared, in the streets of Rome, Paris, or Stockholm, the tall, pale, blonde wife hung upon his arm, dressed elegantly, but generally in gray.

She had evidently given up warring against her husband's beloved art. After lecturing for years with hatred about the "paint-brush business" being brought into the "ancestral home," she would have sacrificed her "nerves" to the death, if she could have prevented the building of the garden studio. But her preaching had no more effect upon his even temperament and external composure, than her dislike of it had upon his ambitious industry. The studio was finished before her eyes, and the detestable "models" passed unembarrassed by the "gracious lady." One beautiful picture after another was finished, and the still more detested "earnings of the paint-brush" came directly to the aristocratic address of Baron von Schilling. There being nothing else left for the excellent wife

to do, she decided to guard her husband's reputation, subjected, as his profession made him, to so many temptations.

She was well adapted for this position, which was dictated by the wild, unspoken love she had for him.

Her delicate health did not prevent her from undertaking tiresome journeys. She never protested against—what he never asked her to undertake. When the day was set for his departure she had her trunks ready to join him. She wandered through picture-galleries and art museums, down into ravines and up mountains, and as soon as he began to sketch, she would sit down at a little distance, and begin that everlasting embroidery.

In art circles she was more than disliked, for her sovereignty implied contempt of the profession, and her want of appreciation of her husband's genius. And when, in 1866, the baron went to the seat of war in Bohemia, partly in the service, and partly to make some new studies, there was grand rejoicing among his artist friends, because for once his long, gray shadow would be forced to stay at home.

In society she was of course not considered "pretty," but she was *comme il faut*, and her visiting-card represented two distinguished names. She was an heiress in her own right, and was a strong, a fanatical Catholic. This opened doors for her, particularly in Rome.

It was a surprise for the neighbors to see smoke issuing once more, day after day, from the Pillar House chimneys and the garden gas-lamps lighted at night. It was reported that Baron Schilling was engaged on some great work, and had retired to his home to complete it undisturbed. He was rarely seen about the house or garden. He took solitary horseback rides, and rode into odd by-paths to gather wild flowers, or sketch some pleasuring party. His atelier stood in the garden at the back of the Pillar House, in the center of a piece of ground that formed a park in the surrounding closely built neighborhood. Here the studio nestled in a picturesque solitude, where birds sung in the rich foliage of the trees, and drank at the fountains, in the waters of which the tame ducks swam and dived. It was a spot where nature and art were made to harmonize.

CHAPTER X.

THE glass door leading upon the southern veranda of the Pillar House stood open. The morning air came in fresh and sweet, but the large salon parlor was close and warm, for the

orangery around the corner terrace prevented the breeze from entering freely through the open windows.

The breakfast-table was set in a corner, where, from behind a large magnolia-tree, a wild grape-vine ran over the wall of the house and dropped some of its vines and foliage gracefully over the veranda balustrade and crept down to twine itself about the nearest pillar. Bright-plumed macaws swung themselves on their stands under the orange-trees, and stretched their screeching necks toward the bread-baskets on the table. Sparrows hopped chirpingly along the baluster ready to attack the waiting breakfast. Minka also came stealing out, but suspiciously sly, as if she had escaped through some door that had been carelessly left open. Minka's destructive nature had not mended with time; she still tore every letter, photograph, or anything else she could get hold of into atoms; she broke her mistress's fans and parasols; she chewed the servants' clothes to flinders; she hid jewelry and odds and ends in all remote corners; but the baroness was her warm defender as of yore; she bought herself new fans and parasols, she reimbursed the servants for damage done their property, and personally aided in searching for hidden articles, though she mounted to the top of the house in the service of her pet.

The mischievous animal was quick and agile as she was eight years ago. She scattered with one spring upon the baluster the screeching macaws, and to spite them, stuffed her cheeks with cake from the table, but all on the flight toward the opposite end of the terrace, for which she was bound. There the double avenues began, and on the vine-covered wall, shaded by the trees, the monkey curled herself among the cool foliage. Directly after, the baroness, followed by a finely formed, imposing-looking lady, came out upon the terrace. Adelaide von Riedt had been the convent schoolmate and intimate friend of the baroness from girlhood. She was still young, but rather plain-looking, with her hair brushed severely back from her brunette face. When Baron Schilling left his wife for Bohemia, that lady had urged her "long-dispensed-with friend" to make her a visit, and since that time Miss Riedt had made frequent visits at Schillingscourt for the purpose of nursing the invalid lady. She was without kith or kin, and a prebendary member of the convent.

She arranged a shawl upon a wicker chair for the baroness, and placed a soft rug under her feet, and attended to her delicate friend with gentle solicitude.

"Do attend to those hungry screechers, Adelaide," the baroness remarked fretfully, pointing to the noisy macaws.

"Arnold has a positive passion of making me senseless and detestable presents, and I am, for politeness' sake, obliged to accept and endure them," she sighed, grievously.

Her voice was less soft and deeper toned, and her complexion a shade more ashen, while innumerable lines about the eyes and mouth made her look prematurely old.

A white, long flowing wrapper, elegantly embroidered and trimmed with blue-ribboned bows, hung loosely upon her angular form, forming a decided contrast to the closely fitting, plain black silk dress of her friend, whose toilet had been completed thus for the day.

While she was breaking up some biscuits for the macaws, a young girl came out, bearing the breakfast upon a waiter.

The baroness frowned.

"Where is Birkner, and why are you attending to breakfast, Johanna?" she asked, irritably.

"Mamselle Birkner begs you will excuse her; she is suffering with a severe headache," the girl replied, looking at the lady with a pair of dark, somberly earnest eyes.

"The table is only set for two," scolded the baroness.

"The baron breakfasted in his studio, and went away on horseback two hours ago."

The baroness bit her lips, and turned her head away in silence.

At this moment distressing cries came from the garden. Minka danced around the grass-plat in a frantic manner, rubbing her back and screaming with all her impish might, and on the top of the garden wall stood a second impish-looking creature, with two thin legs protruding from a pair of short, bagging velvet pantaloons. Master Guy balanced in one hand a big tin horn, and with the other held his sides with laughter. He felt like turning heels over head with delight at the effect of his horn blast.

The servants came running to the aid of the unhappy Minka, and at the gable window in the other house appeared the still handsome but aging face of Mrs. Lucian. She lifted her hand threateningly at the boy and uttered a stinging reproof.

The senator also appeared on the other side of the wall, that he had mounted by a ladder placed against it by his son.

"Don't trouble yourself, Teresa!" he called up to his sister. "I am able to attend to my own affairs. There is no occasion for anger here any way. If people will keep such nasty vermin about them, they may do so for what I care, but let 'em keep it between their own walls, and not creep upon other people's property to scare the life out of them. I shall

not punish my son for the well-deserved lesson the beast received."

The face at the window vanished, and the senator grabbed his long-legged, struggling "hopeful" and bore him down the ladder. His coarse speech reached every ear on the terrace. "The wretch!" said the startled baroness; "and I have no redress—I can not complain to Arnold because poor Minka is the sufferer."

She withdrew behind the magnolia, and leaned her head despondently against the wall. "The hateful animal!" she lamented; "some one has left the door open on purpose to annoy me—I know these mean little tricks—Minka's escape from my rooms was premeditated." She cast a resentful look upon the girl—"You did it, Johanna."

The girl's face became crimson.

"Excuse me, madame, but I protest against the accusation. I never neglect my duty," she replied modestly but with firmness; and quietly left the room, after waiting a moment for the lady to reply or give some order.

"That 'Hanna' is another of the afflictions Arnold has just put upon me, and I can but sigh, powerless to help myself," the baroness complained, while the canoness waited on her as if she were a child. "I shudder whenever she approaches me; her presence affects me with the breath of a self-murderer—she is Adam's child—and such a disagreeable physiognomy as she has! Her face is like a stone, as if a dead soul were back of it, and still the girl has a temper; she behaved like mad for a long while after that shocking catastrophe." The baroness shrugged her shoulders. "They have expected a great deal of me and my powers of endurance in this house; there is no peace to be found in Schillingscourt."

An ironical smile parted the lips of Adelaide. "Is that a complaint, Clementine?" she queried, looking severely at the lady. "When a person takes their fate into their own hands and plunges into the path so eagerly sought, they must abide by the consequences. Had you remained faithful to an early resolve, you would now have peace in the blessed protection of God's sheltering walls. But Johanna is a dutiful and serviceable girl, and has become really indispensable about the house. Confident of her father's innocence, she has grown up with the fixed idea that the truth will some day vindicate his name."

"Berkner has told me as much. That woman has spoiled the girl. It is really ridiculous! The absurd thing takes the matter to heart as if some noble escutcheon had been disgraced." She declined the dish offered, pushed back her

plate, and crumbled biscuit into her tea. "Bah! who wants to be bothered with such old stories! My father-in-law was frustrated in his plans by the tattling Adam, luckily for me. Life would have been intolerable with the old man had he become a millionaire, like the person over there!"

She pointed to the wall where the gray head of the senator had made its appearance shortly before. The indolent neighbor had suddenly become a lively enemy.

"Vulgar neighborhood, this Cloister estate!" she muttered, "and among those coarse-grained people Arnold found a companion—'his only friend,' as he is pleased to call him."

"That Felix Lucian, you mean, who eloped with a dancing woman," Miss Riedt remarked. "Oh, Clementine, what strange, worldly elements have tided about you!"

The baroness frowned, and replied with energy:

"They could not touch me—I repel such associations! But study those square Schilling heads over in the gallery: there you will see each face stamped with self-will—Arnold calls it strength and courage—can I manage such a man? Reserve and disdain are the weak but only weapons that can be used by the wives of the Schillings. I have not yet confided to you that my husband has been drawn into a family secret, in consequence of which I may shortly be forced to tolerate about a person who may utterly destroy my peace and—"

A noise at the door caused the baroness to stop and turn her head away with an ungraciously repellent motion. A servant had approached, carrying Minka on his arm.

"I only wished to announce that the poor little creature has recovered its spirits," the man stammered, taken back at the reception the monkey met with.

"Very well. The chastisement won't do her any harm. She is to be placed under arrest. I do not wish to see her again to-day."

The servant handed her the mail portfolio and retired. In the hall he laughed in his sleeve. Heretofore when anything had happened to the "black canaille"—just called the "poor little creature" before her mistress—she had been examined and tenderly nursed—and now this sudden change. What the dislike of the baron and the lamentations of the servants had not been able to accomplish, the coarse remark of the senator had settled—Minka was in disgrace! It was a good joke.

The "mail portfolio" was a practical arrangement, inaugurated by the baroness—for fear a careless domestic might misplace or lose a letter the mail was placed in this manner

into the hands of the mistress—and every letter that came to Schillingscourt passed through the fingers of that lady before it reached the party it was addressed to.

Gracefully languid, she examined the contents now until she came upon a superscription that startled her as if a spider had crept over her hands. The letter was bordered with black, and the sealing-wax was distinctly impressed with a monogram.

"Ah!" said she, dismayed, "I had hoped they would not come. 'Lupus infabula,' Adelaide," she remarked, handing the letter addressed to the baron to her friend, with a forced laugh, "that probably announces the contemplated arrival of the people I was telling you about. Shall you be able to breathe the same air, and live under the same roof with a former dancer?"

The dark, clever face of the canoness froze into icy reserve. "That dancing woman coming here!" she exclaimed; "and, may I ask, Clementine, how can you be so unutterably weak-minded as to permit this intrusion?"

The baroness was embarrassed, and began brushing the crumbs from the table-cloth to avoid meeting the other's eyes.

"My husband absolutely begged me—he is not in the habit of begging—"

"Ah, that is certainly overwhelming." The serene face of the sarcastic speaker did not have the desired effect. The "distinguished lady" before her changed to the "spoiled child," and said: "Now don't play the pedagogue, Adelaide; I know my position, and how to conduct myself! I resisted firmly, be assured. What is it to me that this Felix Lucian died? That his estates were confiscated and his family impoverished! I look upon it as the avenging hand of God, laid upon the disobedient son who allowed himself to be dazzled, and turned against his own mother."

"The old woman we saw at the window?"

"Yes. She declines to hear anything about her son to this day, and very justly, too. She is not aware of his death, nor what he left his children. She scrapes and saves alone for her brother's child, the grotesque skeleton that you saw on the wall awhile ago. It would be a good thing if some of the property were willed away from the spoiled, hateful boy! But what does that affair concern me! It has tasked my patience enough to listen to Arnold, when he speaks of his "poor friend," and how fervently he wished his mother could see his two idolized children. It was his last request that his young widow return to Germany with the children—and dear knows what—I paid very little attention. But now these dreams and

plans are to be carried out, notwithstanding the great difficulties. Senator Wolfram takes good care to keep his sister removed from all communication with, and recollections of, her son; he is to be kept completely in the dark. The grandmother is to see the children without knowing who they are, at first. Goodness knows how they expect to manage it. But Schillingscourt is the ground of maneuvering—and Arnold has invited them here."

"And you countenance the intrigue, and are hand in hand with them in the secret?"

"Certainly, if I do not retract my promise," was the vexed and wearied reply. "Not one of the servants, but Birkner, who is the only one who would recognize the former Miss Fournier, are to know who the visitors are."

"Is this letter from the widow?" Adelaide asked, looking at the firm handwriting on the envelope.

The baroness smiled scornfully.

"I doubt whether this former dancing-girl is able to write a respectable letter; I think Lucian's half-sister, a Mrs. Mercedes de Valmaseda, has taken the preliminaries in hand. She writes short, curt letters in a most condescending style, and I am amazed at Arnold's good-nature in putting up with it. Her husband is probably some grandee, or some noble hidalgo, who struts in the pride of a patched mantle—for they have been fearfully reduced by the war—these slave-holding lords of the south."

She bounded as if electrified from her languid attitude. The iron gate opened, and Baron Schilling rode into the garden. The woman with the weary body and fainting soul was for one moment the personification of intense, passionate expectation. Then with a glance from under her drooping eyelids at her friend, she fell back into her general apathy again.

CHAPTER XI.

THE baron sprung from his horse, and threw the lines to a servant in waiting, and motioned for Hanna, who stood in the hallway, to approach.

"Here, my child, take these into the studio; you know where the others are."

He threw some flowers into the girl's apron; then, taking a few fresh wild roses from his button-hole, he handed them to her also, saying: "Give them to Birkner, and tell her I have not forgotten to pick the first I have seen this season for her, just as I have done since I was a little boy."

"He is crazy," muttered the baroness, as she leaned over the balustrade, and fixed her angry eyes upon the group. The baron caressed his horse and said some affectionate words to the beautiful animal, while the man held the lines ready to lead him away. "My Lord! a person would think he was parting from the creature forever!" the watching woman remarked, dryly. "Who in their right senses would endure seeing so much love lavished on a beast!" She took up a parcel of letters and held them over the baluster. "Arnold," she exclaimed, shrilly, "these are for you!"

The baron lifted his hat with a bow to the speaker, and entered the house.

The canoness cleared a space on the table, and lifted the lids of the dishes to see if their contents were still warm.

"Never mind, Adelaide; I never offer him anything when he has emancipated himself from rules, and breakfasted alone —no matter how hungry he may be after his ride."

With rapid strides the baron joined them on the terrace, after leaving his hat in-doors. He shook hands with his wife and bowed coldly to her friend, who returned the greeting in like manner, and seated herself at some distance, with her work—silver embroidery on violet cloth.

"Donna de Valmaseda has written," the baroness remarked, with peculiar intonation of the name, as she pushed the letter toward a corner of the table.

The baron opened and glanced hastily over what the letter contained.

"We may expect our protégés in a week or ten days," he remarked, "and you will have to make a change in your reception programme, Clementine, for Mrs. Valmaseda will accompany her sister-in-law, according—as she states here—to the express wishes of Felix—"

"Indeed! and how many more wishes may this Felix have expressed that we must *nolens volens* fulfill?" The lady lost none of her languor in speaking—but the hands in her lap were spitefully tearing some grape-leaves to pieces. "Schillingscourt has ever been something of a hotel for this presuming person, even within my recollection, when he came storming the house with his eloping bride, eight years ago. I protest against this addition to the party. It is enough if I consent to have the quiet of my house disturbed with the widow and her children."

Her husband listened to this opposition in a perfectly unmoved manner. During the first years of their married life, his face expressed solicitude and anxiety to please and under-

stand his wife—now every feature displayed utter indifference. He replaced the letter in its envelope and quietly said: "We shall have to adapt ourselves to this addition."

"By no means! It is an unprecedented intrusion on the part of this woman."

"I told you it must be done."

"There is no *must* about it. Schillingscourt is not large enough to entertain a caravan of human beings." She was growing excited.

"There is room enough to obviate the necessity of your coming in contact. Be generous, be sensible, Clementine; consider that it is our mission to help restore the orphans to their own—"

"Oh, yes, with this touching perspective you won my consent; but I have come to the conclusion since that I would be doing wrong to take part in an—but ask Adelaide what she calls it."

"An unlawful intrigue!" the canoness cried.

The baron looked over his shoulder at her. "Ah! ah! There is the cause of this change. I had forgotten your private spiritual adviser."

"Clementine will bear me out when I say that I abstained from giving any advice," the lady replied in vindication.

"Glad to hear it, Miss Riedt. I will excuse you from any unwarranted meddling in my affairs."

The reproof was accepted with a shrug of the shoulders, but the baroness exclaimed, indignantly:

"Do not blame the innocent for a determination that is entirely the result of my own sense of right. On mature thought, I have concluded they shall not come here at all, and I take back my consent. I will not have it! And now let the matter rest, or you will drive me to extremes!"

"In what respect?"

She watched the unmoved questioner from under her drooping eyelids—a clever retreat was impossible; that calm face would have its answer, but her voice was a trifle uncertain as she replied:

"You must not forget that I hold hypothecated claims on Schillingscourt."

The baron's face became a shade paler, but he rejoined, quietly:

"I do not forget it any more than I can forget my dignity, and that I am master of this house. I will leave you now and consult Birkner in regard to the arrangements for the strangers."

"Then go! You will, of course, leave my apartments out of your calculations. I have no intention of permitting these —these Spanish paupers to sleep under the expensive curtains of my guest-chamber bedsteads. Let them take up their quarters in the haunted bedrooms."

"I believe that has already been decided on," he interrupted her, with a silencing motion. "It is to be hoped this stranger's education has partaken of a less superstitious color than some convent-bred natures in this country."

He gathered up his letters and walked away.

The baroness rose, and stood, as if considering for a moment, then with a quick glance at the canoness, who appeared oblivious of all that had taken place, she ran after her husband. How the lace barbes and blue ribbons of her breakfast-cap fluttered, and the long white wrapper swept the floor, as she flew after the retreating baron!

"Arnold!"

"Well?" he queried, without pausing.

"Arnold, come back! I will be good. Forgive me!" Her voice betrayed such repressed passion and agitated pleading that her arms opened involuntarily to the yearning heart's behest.

"I have nothing to forgive—I am not angry."

He hastened his movements, but his wife caught up to him, noiselessly as a shadow, put her arm through his, and looked into his face in time to see the expression of desperation and repulsion there.

"Arnold," she exclaimed, threateningly—for her unexpected presence had surprised him into a repelling action, as if he would have struggled to escape an ugly dream—"you are committing a sin! Think of what the physicians have said. It is your duty to avoid exciting me—they impressed upon you the danger—"

He set his teeth hard together and remained silent. Together they walked down the terrace steps; any stranger seeing them would have imagined this slowly promenading couple a picture of domestic bliss as they moved along under the trees of the double avenue.

"Pardon, Arnold, that thoughtless reminder of the Steinbruck claims."

The baron received the apology with a touch of impatience as he gazed into the lovely perspective of the arena.

"Oh, do drop the subject, Clementine, and don't spoil this glorious morning for me by this tiresome 'mine and thine.'"

"But I only want to tell you that I think no more of those claims than you do," she persisted.

"There you are greatly mistaken. I think of them very often. Every time I wander under these dear old trees and look at the Pillar House—every time I add to the capital that is to redeem the mortgages, at least, upon the old homestead."

"Nonsense! Do you not share all that I possess?"

"No. During my father's life I submitted to the idea of joint possession, but you are an admirable book-keeper, and know that since his death this has not been the case for one hour." His face cleared with this relieving declaration, and resumed its wonted calm, that seemed to exasperate his wife more than his opposition.

"How considerate, how kind of you to tell me in this brutal manner that you are in no way my debtor—that you can do without me!"

"Without your money, Clementine."

"How correct my instincts were when they warned me at the very beginning of our married life that your art proclivities would prove my mortal enemy! You gloat over the independence it gives you!"

"My secret art!" he exclaimed, with tender enthusiasm. "When I gaze into her beaming eyes, all mercenary interests sink far, far beneath me! But you are right. It is another of the blessings she has showered upon me, and with it I escape the woman's foot that would bear still more tyrannically upon my neck. But though this salvation were not mine, Clementine, you would have as little power to rule me with your money as you have now. I could have supported myself honorably with my knowledge in jurisprudence."

He stood still and drew a deep respiration as he drew himself up to his fullest height.

"Really, then, you and I are done with each other," the baroness remarked, dryly. "You prove to me that I am absolutely a cipher in your existence, and I am foolish enough to be your dutiful subordinate listener meanwhile. But I would be an idiot if I didn't make you feel in what way I have contributed to your welfare. I shall leave you. You have accepted my solicitude for your comfort as a matter of course. You have never shown your approval of the pains I have taken to represent your house; but society has, happily, been more appreciative. Now, sir, find out by experience what it is to be without a wife! Get along the best you can with the strange beggars that expect to swarm into Schillingscourt, and the stupid housekeeping mamselle, who hasn't sense enough

to reach her little finger. To-morrow morning I begin my long-contemplated pilgrimage to Rome."

"No, don't, Clementine," her husband remarked, laughing; "you know these sacred excitements are very bad for your delicate nerves; you always return from such pilgrimages badly used up."

"That is some more of your blasphemous talk! What we do for the honor of God can not injure us. I leave to-morrow."

"Then go, in God's name! I shall make no further attempt to restrain you."

He resumed his walk quietly, and she returned to the house. Ringing for her dressing-maid, she ordered her traveling trunks to be brought and packed at once. Then she rejoined her friend on the terrace.

"Put away your altar-cloth, Adelaide; your dearest wish is about to be realized. We are going to Rome!" she exclaimed, excitedly.

The canoness dropped her work into the basket and rose. An imposing presence she was, as she stood before the baroness, with her eyes glowering from the depths of her angry soul.

"Beware, Clementine!" said she, with finger lifted in warning. "Your spiritual welfare is at stake! Your unholy passion drives you from one sin to another. It is not religious fervor that is taking you to Rome—far from it—but anger and resentment; a secret hope that your absence will awaken a longing for you in the heart of your unloving, cold husband." An indignant motion from the baroness had no effect upon the stern-visaged woman before her. "You can not deceive me any more than our worthy Father Franciscus. We have been painfully observant how you are wasting your life in the endeavor to rule the man who worships nothing but his miserable art, and if you did succeed! What a pitiful victory! Conquer yourself! You have lost all stability; you have become a capricious character; you make resolutions only to break them. But I am now authorized by Pater Franciscus and the sisters who have watched your childhood to say to you: 'Thus far, and no further.' You have resolved on making this Romish pilgrimage in a spirit of boundless selfishness, and your penance for this sin consists in conquering the unholy fire consuming you, and setting on this journey with a contrite heart at once! No 'turning back' in self-indulgence as you have done for years; no caprice; no parting sorrow, not even sickness must turn you now. If need be you are to be carried to the traveling-carriage. The journey must be undertaken."

As if driven, the baroness retreated backward toward the door. This woman's chains reached from the spot upon which she stood to the very foundation of the holy convent.

"Who said I would turn back—that I would change my mind?" she replied. "I shall start for Rome to-morrow, though I have to be dragged sick unto death from place to place." Then she went in-doors to alarm the house with her preparations for the pilgrimage.

CHAPTER XII.

SEVERAL days have passed since that exciting morning. Silence reigned in the second story of the Pillar House. The blinds were drawn, and the doors were locked and barred. They were not even to be opened for airing, was the last order of the baroness.

Baron Schilling was in his studio; a passing shower had scattered its millions of diamond drops upon the freshened foliage, and cleared the sultry air around the place. The birds were singing gratefully, and the sky looked down over all, with every cloud removed from its blue face.

This change in nature had not been noticed by the artist before his easel. He was gazing upon a summer night scene, glowing with the torch-lights that reflected their red tints from the windows of a palace nestling in a park of monster trees, and looked real enough to leave an impression that the sunlight of the studio must be submerged in their fierce glare.

The hush of the place was broken by the monotonous and dreamy rippling of falling water behind the heavy folds of a curtain of green vapor that covered the whole south side of the atelier.

The melancholy rippling and dripping seemed part of the heavy atmosphere of that summer night on the canvas, on which a glimpse of fountain spray could be seen here and there among the trees, brought out by the torch-lights.

Wrapped in his dreams, that bore him far from reality, the artist labored. He did not see the door open, nor hear the light footfall of the young girl who entered.

"Baron Schilling, the strangers have arrived."

He started at the sound of Hanna's voice, but hastened into the garden, murmuring:

"My Felix's children!"

When he reached the house he found the doors wide open, and servants bringing in trunk after trunk. On the floor, beside the remains of a small trunk that had contained

hats and innumerable fancy articles, laces, ribbons, etc., knelt the maid Minna, balancing on her hand a ruin that had once been a lady's hat, and had just been unearthed from the tumbled mass of what was left of the trunk.

The flute-like voice that re-echoed from the marble walls so sweetly one night eight years ago again resounded with its elfin laughter.

"Clumsy people!" she scolded, merrily, "to abuse one's effects like that; that can only happen in good old Germany. But I'm awfully provoked about it. That hat was the prettiest thing!—and now look at it! ha, ha, ha! Bah! don't make such a face about the thing, Minna; am I to blame for the destruction?"

She pushed with her little foot a bolt of blue ribbon back from whence it had rolled. Jewelry was abundant about her, and every movement created a rustling of rich garments. She lifted her hands to arrange the curls that were crushed about her face, but held them out the next instant in joyous greeting to the entering lord of the manor, as she rushed to meet him. "Here we are, *cher* baron! Great Lord! how am I reminded of poor Felix, in seeing you again! Who would have thought it! that I should be a widow so soon—and so young! Poor fellow! and he lies over there now all alone! Oh, he suffered so much, it was terrible! But, in reality, Felix was dead to me when he received that awful wound. I can't bear to see any one suffer. A sick-room is a hell to me—so dark and somber; and the frightful groans; the whispering nurses—these things depress me so that I always run away from it."

She turned, as her attention was attracted by an iron-bound chest the men were bringing in. It evidently contained something weightier than the other baggage, to judge by the puffing and blowing of the bearers.

"We take up considerable room, don't we?" the little lady continued, with a merry laugh, pointing to the luggage; "and we have met with a mishap, too. Do you see that *something* there that Minna is wagging about so mournfully? It used to be the sweetest little bonnet—I got it in Hamburg for second mourning. And look at that trunk! Did ever any one see such clumsy work before?"

The little hands Baron Schilling had taken sympathetically in his own were suddenly dropped. The graceful little being, with her butterfly soul, had returned as she had gone. She plucked only the thornless blossoms of life. She ran away from the field of sorrow. The two tears that had dimmed her

eyes a moment before were doubtless honest tears, but they were lost in the dimpled laughter over a broken trunk and a crushed bonnet.

"Did my people do that?" he asked, shortly.

"Oh, goodness, no! That was done on the cars. Pshaw! there's no harm done! I shall at once send to my former milliner in Berlin, and have that hat replaced. She will be more than delighted to get my custom ag—" She paused, with a shy look behind her. The baron followed her glance, and, for the first time, noticed the group waiting silently in a corner of the corridor.

Those stony-faced marble guardians of Schillingscourt had certainly never looked upon such an ebony-black, kinky-headed human being as the one standing on its marble flags now.

A negress! How the servants passing to and fro stared at her, while she smiled good-naturedly at them with thick, red-lipped mouth.

She held a little girl on her arm, a pale, dark-eyed child, in a white cashmere cloak. The little thing seemed frightened; she clung with frail arms about the woman's neck, and pressed her little white face close to the black cheek.

Near one of the statues close by stood a lady, holding a boy about seven years old by one hand, the other resting on the pedestal of the marble deity. The widow's costume was lightened by the gray and white half-mourning, but this lady was dressed in deepest black, without the least relief, and she appeared like a statue of Night with her long veil and drapery, by the side of the sculptured marble. Two large serious eyes, in a most beautiful feminine face, were waiting the movement of the widow with a decided frown.

"My task-master is vexed," Lucille murmured, with a pout. "Come, baron, Lady Mercedes don't like to be kept waiting. She is the most stuck-up being, this cotton princess!"

Baron Schilling walked quickly toward the group, that began to show life now. The lady bent over the boy until her crape veil, which had been thrown back and fell about her person like a mantle, drooped over her face and covered it as she whispered a few words, and then led the little fellow to the master of the house.

"My papa sends his love to you, Uncle Arnold. He bade me give it to you before he went to grandpapa in heaven," the boy said, in pure, fluent German.

With deep emotion the baron embraced the child and kissed him repeatedly. How like he was to the fair-haired boy who

never found a home in the "Hawk's Nest." This child should have a happier life.

"You shall be mine—my brave boy, my José," said he, affectionately.

"Yes, *cher* baron, do take pity on him; I never can bring him up in the world! I am too young—such a baby-mamma, as Felix always called me—José and I are more like brother and sister—he only laughs at me when I attempt to be sensible. Pshaw! the idea of being his mamma—see, baron, this is more like it—that is my sweet baby, my Pauly, we belong together; she is my idol, you must know—are we not alike in every feature?"

The baron made no reply. He turned to the other lady; she had remained passive until now, when, with an imperious gesture, she ordered the iron-bound chest to be set down at his feet. The action was so thoroughly that of one accustomed to commanding a host of slaves that the gentleman stepped back a pace.

Lucille observed it and smiled spitefully; but she went through the form of a tardy introduction. Then Mamselle Birkner appeared and announced that the rooms were ready for the travelers.

"Thank Heaven that we are housed once more!" Lucille exclaimed; "I am tired to death; I am literally yearning to lie down where I can stretch my limbs!" she limped from one foot to the other with the action of a tired little bird. "Come, Mercedes, let us make ourselves comfortable."

Mercedes moved not an inch from the spot.

"Is the lady of the house sick?" she asked, fixing her large eyes for the first time upon her host.

With visible embarrassment the baron replied:

"My wife is in Rome just now."

Lucille burst into a merry laugh.

"You don't say so, *cher* baron! 'Just now,' indeed! I might have guessed something of the kind. The lady is a little peculiar."

Mercedes said nothing, but she buttoned her gloves again, drew the veil over baby Pauly's face, and, taking José's hand, then quietly remarked, though her eyes flashed indignantly, as she moved toward the door:

"Will you kindly direct us to the nearest hotel, sir?"

"Under any other circumstance, madame, you would be justified in declining hospitality in the absence of the mistress of the house," the baron impressively replied in a low tone; "but remember you are not come as a visitor, but on a mission

in the accomplishment of which this location is necessary. My poor friend surely did not believe that his last fervent wishes could be frustrated by an inconsiderate act. I do not know how long my wife will be absent; but, until her return, you will be the only occupants of Schillingscourt, with the exception of the servants. My quarters are in the garden yonder, in my atelier."

When the word "mission" left his lips, the lady turned; when he had finished speaking she bent her head assentingly and followed, as he led the way, with Lucille clinging to his arm, the servants blinking curiously after the whole party, as they disappeared in the apartments prepared for them.

"Nobody offered to pay the driver, so I had to do it," one of the domestics grumbled. "I wonder if I'll see my money again—well, I'll put it down to 'house expenses.' What eyes the baroness will make! I heard her tell Miss Riedt, the day before she went away, that they were nothing but a pack of Spanish beggars. It looks very much like it. There is nothing in the trunks but clothes—and in that iron-bound thing there, I guess there may be some books—it's heavier than the other baggage," the man continued, pointing to the chest he had assisted in depositing before Lady Mercedes; "and Birkner says the baron became acquainted with them in Paris. I don't know, I'm sure. I wasn't along the last time he was there. But the mistress has got her back up on account of him inviting them—a blind man can see that—six of 'em—Heigho! all to be fed—and the mistress is a close accountant; every penny spent in the kitchen is noted, and every bottle of wine not emptied at the table she keeps her eyes on. Look out for the fun! We'll not be rid of these Moorish monsters very soon, and a nice row the mistress will make!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE baron led his guests toward the room with carved walls, where eight years before Lucille had taken tea with Felix. It was just as she remembered it then, only the silver had been taken from the massive sideboards, and replaced with plain chinaware. Hanna stood before them taking a last survey, with duster still in hand.

Lucille gave one glance into the apartment, then drew back indignantly. "But, my dear baron," she exclaimed, "you are surely not going to put us in that great barn of a room, where spooks haunt the walls, and tramping and sighing make night hideous! Don't you recollect how your wife was fright-

ened that evening? Ugh! what a cross face you are making, it's enough to scare one; can I help it if my foolish little head won't forget such awful things? There is the identical spot" —she pointed to the wall where the lounge with its green silk pillows stood—"that is where your wife sat when she felt the cold breath upon her—"

"Lucille, don't be a baby! Think of José," Mercedes interrupted. Her low resonant voice, that lent a singular charm to the German language, at this moment evinced considerable vexation, and she took the little lady by the hand with decided energy and led her into the room.

Like an ill-natured and spoiled child, Lucille jerked away her hand, saying, petulantly: "Pshaw! I'd rather be a baby than play Grandmother Wisdom! Why should not José know that this room is haunted—absurd! Ask your Deborah there" —she pointed to the negress—"she knows some awful stories about ghosts, one more blood-curdling than the other. While you were cooped up with Felix, reading the newspapers to him, I sat out on the veranda and listened to the stories she used to tell José. We don't know which of us was the most scared, do we, José?"

The negress gave a glance of guilty fright at her mistress, and began hastily removing Pauly's wrappings. Lucille, however, took off her gloves, hat, and cloak, and cast piece upon piece at Minna, who caught them like an adept at the business. Then the little lady curled up cozily on the nearest divan like some pet kitten, saying:

"So be it then. I have at present but one desire, and that is to rest. I hope, *cher* baron, your noisy ghost will have the goodness to abstain from his meanderings in broad daylight at least. Ugh! was he not a self-murderer, or something akin to it? He was a thief—or was it not the man who betrayed the dear good old baron—"

"He was neither thief nor traitor, our good Adam." The baron cut short the gossiping lady very curtly, looking solicitously at the young lady before the sideboard, who had suddenly created a clattering among the china there. Her face was ashen pale, and she fairly glared at the chattering woman. The baron motioned for her to take the loaded-down Minna into the adjoining room, and as she passed him, he placed his hand gently upon her shining braids, saying with affectionate sympathy: "We know better, don't we, Hanna?"

Lucille bounced from her reclining attitude.

"What?" said she, "Hanna? Is that large, handsome person the barefooted little thing—Adam's child—who—"

He approached her with hasty strides.

"My dear lady, may I beg you will considerately drop such reminiscences?" he interposed, without attempting to disguise his annoyance. "You know what you came hither for; and you know that the servants are not to suspect even who you are."

"Sure enough! I've got my lesson learned. I am a friend of yours from Paris. I am to inhale this vigorous German air for the benefit of my nerves, etc., etc. A stupid, harrowing bore, this character I am to play."

She, the "idolized elf," rather protested at being so rudely reproached, and stared at the speaker to that effect; but as her eyes made no impression, she curled upon the pillows with her head resting on her upraised arms, and coolly said:

"Baron Schilling, permit me to tell you something. If I had not been frantic to get back to Europe and to the old scenes that, little goose, I deserted so senselessly, I should not have promised to come here for all the world, be assured of that. I never could enter into the idea fully, but poor Felix nursed it into a fixed hope during his long sickness, as people will hold on to one idea sometimes, and now I ask what is the use?—we are rich."

The baron looked up in surprise, but the large proud eyes of Mercedes met him with an impressive expression, and she laid her finger on her lips in token of silence.

"Immensely rich at that," Lucille continued, not observing the by-play between the other two. "Felix was always in a condition to gratify all my wishes; though this childish head of mine had been set upon having my carriage-horses shod with gold, and the harness inlaid with diamonds, he would have had it done. Just now I am kept short enough, owing to the stupid guardianship I am placed under and duped by, and led by the nose as she sees fit, not to mention other most distasteful dictations." She cast a wicked glance at the window where Mercedes stood. "Bah! I'll shake it off, don't you be afraid," she added, with a merrily confident laugh, shaking her curls, and hammering the lounge-cushions at her feet with the heels of her little boots. "*Enfin*, we don't need the milk and butter savings and scrapings that Felix used to tell me about—absolutely not!"

In the interval Mercedes had also removed her hat and cloak. The portrait-painter in South Carolina had certainly been master of his art. The face on the porcelain of the thirteen-year-old girl and that of the woman of to-day were identical in tender outline, and the peculiar complexion, the shade and tint

to remind you of one of Bernstein's brightest gradations. She stood under the northern sky now, with her great, soulful eyes and abundant blue-black hair, form slender and willowy as her bearing was haughty, in the same room where eight years before a merry tongue had dubbed her "humpbacked."

Having removed her gloves and twisted her mourning-ring into proper position, she responded to her sister-in-law's remarks with coldness.

"The first thing to be considered is, whether the grandmother can be attracted toward the children."

Lucille started up and put a hand over each ear, exclaiming passionately:

"Oh, how tired I am of this grandmother business! Ah, *cher* baron, what an unhappy creature that awful America has made of poor little merry Lucille! For months before Felix died, this 'how to propitiate that grandmother' was the constant and unvarying theme in the sick-chamber, and poor I had to nod assent, like a dutiful child, or be reprimanded by the physicians and scolded by Lady Mercedes. But I am myself again, and the play is at an end, and 'that settles it,' as the dear, good old baron used to say. But he is dead, too. I wonder what he would say if he knew my children had been dragged here for the purpose of 'attracting' that ordinary person he hated so? She had better keep out of my way! It won't be well for her to touch my sweet Pauly with her coarse kitchen hands."

She extended one hand triumphantly toward Mercedes.

"At home you sneered at my protests, or gave me some cutting answer whenever that ridiculous plan was broached. Of course Lady Mercedes knew best! But when I pointed the old monk's roost out to you in driving past, your heroism and courage vanished with your illusions. You turned pale as a sheet."

Mercedes bit her lip and bent over José, who remained shyly near her, as if afraid of the strange place.

"I know I turned pale, Lucille. I felt the blood receding and stifling me, as it has gone ever since I have inhaled this German air," she said, after a short silence, and her glance wandered past the baron, absently, and became lost in boundless distance. "I did not believe my nature would rebel against it, because father was German; but I know now that I have inherited neither sympathy nor sentiment of kindliness from him for the country where he was so wretched."

There was no occasion for her to tell that her warm blood

rushed back to its heart so stormily; her deep passionate tones betrayed it.

"I do not forget my promise to Felix; but I shudder at the thought of that old ruined Cloister House. It looks as if hunger, misery and vulgarity reigned therein; and there I am to find the grandmother of our children!"

She inclosed José in a passionate embrace, as if she would proudly defy a vulgar attack upon anything belonging to her. "I am familiar with my father's earlier history, but still I seem now to find a dark secret in his life, because he found my mother's predecessor in that obscure corner of the earth."

With unbounded satisfaction Lucille had listened to every word while reclining on her couch, toying with the silver tassels of the cushions. Her piquant little face, with its malicious eyes, was fairly beaming with delight at the idea of Lady Mercedes giving way to her disappointment in the very first hour of her arrival, and exposing her Spanish opinion before this German nobleman.

"Now he will see what I have had to endure under this 'trainer,'" she thought. However, he was not the nice companionable Baron Schilling of other days; she thought him extremely impertinent in language and manner. Why need he attend so closely to this yellow Spaniard's tirade against Germany, as if it were gospel? And she, the chief personage, Lucille Fournier, Lucian's widow, that ought to be protected as the treasure bequeathed by his friend—she was left to herself, unnoticed, in her sofa corner, as if she were a wooden model. The monster! The silver tassel cut the air in a desperate circle, and the little foot kept time upon its cushion. "Misery, vulgarity, obscure corner!" she reiterated pathetically, then burst into a hearty laugh. "How neatly she has described the Cloister estate. I am avenged, gloriously avenged! Can I ever forget the evening we—Felix and I—fled from that abominable den! Then we came over here like a pair of strayed children—here all was light and elegance—your wife, *cher* baron, sat on a chair yonder embroidering—she still embroiders, I expect, and—oh! by the way, what has become of that little beast Minka, who had such an extraordinary liking for portraits?"

The baron turned upon her fiercely.

"Oh, pray don't—don't eat me alive!" she cried, with a droll expression of dismay. "My Lord! what have I said out of the way now? It appears as if a body must be mute as a Carthusian, if it is a sin to inquire after the well-being of your wife's favorite monkey. Why are you angry, any way, *cher*

baron? On Mercedes's account? Then let your anger subside. I told her about that amusing little incident long ago. She always tried to look terribly bored when a body talks to her—puts on a grand sort of air, you know, that is very aggravating—but the story about that portrait she has been forced to listen to mercilessly—twice. Bah! I hope you don't intend to do penance because your wife countenanced Minka's entertainment, rather than see the portrait in your possession?"

She was right when she said the baron was angry; at her last words he turned a shade paler.

"Your powers of imagination are fine, Mrs. Lucian," he sharply remarked.

"What!" she stood upon her two little feet in a twinkling. "Do you mean to imply there is no truth in what I have said? Folly! why, you gathered up the pieces yourself! and didn't you say you were going to mend it for the baron, your father, or for—" she shrugged her shoulders. "Well, what do I care, I don't know anything about it!"

"Or—for myself," he quietly remarked.

She gave a forced little laugh. "Yes, I recollect. Does the portrait still exist?"

"It does."

At this laconic reply, Mercedes rapidly approached. Her face had changed color several times during Lucille's rather malicious description. With a haughty smile she now asked the baron: "May I have the portrait again, when it is conveniently handy?"

He took a plain case out of his breast-pocket and handed it to her. This unexpected haste in complying with her request confused and piqued her, but, looking up at him, with a wicked bit of caprice playing about her little mouth, she let the case slide into her pocket without a word.

At this moment a servant entered with refreshments, and the barking of a dog was heard in the hall.

"Oh, auntie, there is Pirate at last!" José joyously cried, running out of the door. In another minute he returned with his arms around the neck of the great creature who was almost supporting the boy. Behind them stood a large square-shouldered negro, who bowed low before Donna Mercedes, and apologized for his long absence, owing to difficulties in getting some large pieces of baggage out of the depot, and also being delayed in securing Pirate's release.

José lost his timidity now that his shaggy playfellow was here, and walked familiarly about the place as if he were in the old home over the sea.

"I was awfully afraid something would happen to Pirate," the boy confidentially chatted now to the baron, who was stroking the creature's splendid head. "He howled frightfully in the dog-car, and set the other dogs to howling and fighting. I thought they would kill each other. Pirate is so wild; Jack says it's because he eats too much meat—a great big dishful. Will he get as much here, uncle? Where is his house? At Aunt Mercedes's he had such a big one I could get into it with him."

The baron laughed and said to the servant:

"Fix a nice bed for the dog in the small barn."

The man scowled at the brute, who had come a little too near his shins to suit him once or twice. He had grinned oddly at the mention of a "great big dish of meat," and now humbly remarked:

"Your pardon, master, but the little barn is so close to the house, and her ladyship, the baroness, couldn't stand the barking of the dog Count Reiner made you a present of, and this dog barks much louder. The baroness would have him sent away."

"Oh! uncle; will Pirate be sent away?" José exclaimed, apprehensively.

"Not a bit of it, my boy! He shall stay at Schillingscourt as long as you. Come with me. We will fit him up comfortable quarters over in my lodgings."

Bowing to the ladies, he motioned for Jack, the negro, to follow; and with Pirate bounding ahead, mad with freedom's joy, they left the room.

"Thank God, that noisy monster is gone!" Lucille sighed, sinking among her pillows once more. "The disagreeable ashen-gray lady baroness and I fully harmonize on this one point at least," she added in somewhat broken English, so that the servants present would not understand. "I objected from the first to this addition to our party, but, as usual, my protest had no weight. Master José insisted on having Pirate, and Master José had his way."

She lifted her head to scrutinize the waiter Mamselle Birkner presented.

"Mercy! coffee in this intolerable heat? No, my good woman, I'd rather be excused. Please order me some vanilla- or strawberry-ice. I am perishing."

The good-natured, and a little corpulent, housekeeper, who had "not sense enough to reach her little finger," according to the baroness's judgment, stood deeply meditative, and very much embarrassed for an answer.

"Ah, no ice, I suppose?" queried Lucille, enjoying the mamselle's distressed attitude; "well, never mind, a glass of champagne will do."

Mamselle Birkner turned in dumb helplessness toward the servant, who was about to make himself scarce: "Robert—you—get it."

"I regret very much," said this personage, with wounded dignity, "that my authority in this department is so limited. My mistress, the baroness—"

Lucille's voice sounded in a ripple of silvery laughter: "I will thank you for a glass of fresh water, then."

The man retired; and Birkner, with a bow for Lady Mercedes, who had acknowledged every attention with lady-like politeness, also left the room.

"Well, that is too good!" Lucille laughingly exclaimed. "Her gracious ladyship has taken the keys of the wine-cellar with her!" With a victorious chuckle, she sprang to a sitting position and brushed the curls from her face, and then closed her hands in an embrace around her knees, while watching, with wickedly twinkling eyes, the exciting pace of her sister-in-law up and down the floor. There was nothing in the peculiar appearance of this young woman, in feature, complexion, or form, to indicate German origin. Just now she was the picture of storm-tossed desperation, from which she was struggling to escape.

"What did I tell Donna de Valmaseda?" Lucille mockingly asked; "was it an exaggeration when I described this Baroness Schilling as the most contemptible woman upon God's earth; the *ne plus ultra* of envy and malignant jealousy? Ugh! she is ugly as sin, and can't endure decent-looking people. But she is clever, that I must concede. The kind woman has reduced the house to a condition that self-respecting persons, with a particle of pride in their composition, could not submit to—the best way to be speedily rid of us. And now, if I may ask, Donna Valmaseda, what next? Baron Schilling—"

"Is a fish-blooded German!" rang out the voice of the angry Mercedes.

"At last!" cried the delighted Lucille, bounding from her sofa, and, opening the door to the adjoining room, called out: "Minna, not an article is to be unpacked but some night-clothes!" Then she ran to the window where Mercedes had remained standing for a moment, and rushed into speech with the energy of a smith who "strikes the iron while it is hot."

"If Felix had known how we should be received here he

would never have asked us to come to this spook-haunted den. The rooms had evidently been deserted by the lady for that reason, and how neatly she has cleared away all evidence of comfort and elegance, the excellent woman! Do you see that cracked and mended and mutilated ware on the sideboard? That beggarly stuff has been hunted out of the store-room dust for our benefit! Eight years ago those boards were loaded down with magnificent silver and cut-glass. I recollect it well, for I had to confess with vexation that mamma's beautiful silverware would not bear comparison. Do you suppose the dear lady was afraid some of her valuables would cling to our fingers?"

Like a little fluttering bird she nestled up to the woman she was maliciously inciting to rebellion, as she tried to catch the expression of her face to see the effect of her words.

"Of course we shall go to Berlin now, won't we, Mercedes?" she coaxingly queried and pleaded. "There is absolutely nothing else left for us to do. Felix desires a German education for his children. There is no better place than Berlin—real German is to be had there; and for me it would be such happiness, such joy!" She pressed her hands to her head as if to keep it from bursting with the blissful contemplation. "To be sure, grandmamma is dead, and mamma has been silly enough to elope with one of her ardent admirers, but that doesn't matter; I have loads and loads of friends there who were perfectly crazy about me. Good heavens! I believe I should even be glad to see that old dotard, Prince Konsky, again. We leave here on the first train in the morning, don't we, Mercedes? I don't, for my part, care a snap"—snap went the little fingers—"for the indignity this runaway man has endeavored to put upon me; but you, Mercedes, you!"

An expression of pain hovered on the lady's lips, but was repressed instantly. Her glance continued its far-away stare, but her bosom heaved tumultuously as she strove for composure. It was evident she did not intend to commune familiarly on the subject of their troubles with this volatile being, whose constant prattle only hampered her own thoughts.

"Well, Mercedes?" queried the eager little woman with the intensely green scintillating eyes.

"We remain. I have come hither from across the sea to fulfill the last wishes of my brother. I will and shall not retreat."

Lucille turned away, brushed past the astonished servitor who had entered with the desired water, and banged the door after

her as she entered the adjoining room, to pour out her sorrows into the sympathizing ears of Minna, her maid.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCHILLINGSCOURT presented a changed aspect within the last few days. Pedestrians slackened their pace in passing the iron fence for the purpose of observing the scene within.

The two negroes were the first to attract public attention.

Jack, the large, shining black man, favored the pillar hall with his presence for hours at a time; leaning against one of the tall, white, flower-crowned columns, and watching delightedly the sprays from the fountain as they fell in millions of diamonds into the rippling lakelet. Or he amused himself scattering crumbs upon the stone steps for the sparrows, while the chubby Deborah waddled about in her percale dress of gay colors, and a bright-ribboned Swiss cap on her woolly head, panting to keep up with her little darling Pauly, whose toddling feet strove to time themselves to the motions of José and his frisky playmate, Pirate.

This was the scene, and the noisy company that attracted again and again the curious public, who were accustomed to witness here the most aristocratic quiet, in which the tall, gray-trailed figure (always muffled in a shawl) of the haughty baroness, was wont to indulge in her solitude. Now there was fluttering butterfly colors, and gay balls and hoops sailing through the air, and merriment resounded through trees and shrubs. Here lay a toy sword, there a neglected doll carriage, and the little strangers who made themselves at home so readily on German soil were handsome as angels and dressed like princes.

Then they were puzzled among what species to place the little being who hovered about the place with her mischievous pranks—was she child or maiden who preserved her childish seeming past the "teens?" She generally appeared on the rush, made a dash at tree or shrub, and gathered some of its foliage to devour it between her glistening pearly teeth; or she tramped with her high-heeled boots over flower-beds to pluck a flower to put among her curls, or masticate it, as the humor happened to be. The public gazed upon the scene as if it were a play, and never tired of admiring the little creature, though the scene changed to the double avenue, and she lay among a lot of silken pillows with one slippered foot dangling from its quantities of lace and ruffles, keeping time to the

caprice of her temper. The hand-bell was also kept busy then, summoning the maid, first for one thing and then for another, until the table was piled up with nectar flasks, bonbon boxes, aromatic salts—and the humor became somewhat improved, the children drew near, and all began to nibble. But that this little Puck-like creature, with her moods and mischief, was the mother of the two ravishing blonde-haired children, no one for a moment imagined. Surely not the old woman who stood at the gable window of the Cloister House so much lately. She never leaned out, nor indeed turned her head toward the despised parterre; but she let her eyes rest, as if magnetized, upon the fair boy in the navy-blue suit, who romped upon the lawn and by-paths; and when his voice resounded in commanding Pirate to retire from forbidden ground, those toil-hardened hands upon the window-sill involuntarily clutched at it in support, and the blood mounted to the pale face with incredible amazement. Baron Schilling had placed his own rooms at Lucille's service the first evening of their arrival. He had migrated to his atelier. The little lady had hurried to take possession of them with her maid and baggage, as if a veritable "spook" were already upon her footsteps. There she had the room flooded in light—Lucia could endure no dark corners. She declared she loved to bathe herself in light, and live on the delicious spices that scented the house from top to bottom when Minna superintended the dainties that were being baked to order for her little mistress, and the dainty clothes she wore were likewise highly perfumed, and the little feet that trembled with a native longing to be ever dancing and tripping, were encased in satin-lined slippers, and down the silvery throat constantly ran the fairest wines. "As if the Lord had provided nothing else to quench thirst," grumbled Robert, who had been ordered by Baron Schilling to provide the finest and most expensive ones for what his mistress had termed "Spanish beggars." But notwithstanding their grumbling, the servants were charmed with the "gracious little lady," who always had a merry word or saucy sally for them in passing. Quite the reverse of the lady who, with the children and her colored servants, remained in the rooms originally intended for them. Her presence animated them with a constant warring between the involuntary respect she inspired and the estimation servants generally place upon what they term the "airs of a beggar." She never conversed with these, and simply acknowledged their daily greeting with an inclination of her head more haughty than the mistress herself; and they disliked her for it, yet when she approached their rude jokes

and laughter were silenced, and they assumed attitudes of respect.

She was a gloriously beautiful woman, and majestic, notwithstanding her slender, willowy form. She usually wore a black lace dress through which the olive tint of her shoulders gleamed. The glowing black eyes had an earnest look, peculiar to the thoughtful face. None of the house domestics were allowed in her apartments; her own servants attended her entirely. The evening after they were installed Birkner was called into the room for the purpose of receiving the bed-linen belonging to the house. She was amazed and dazzled by the change which had been made there. She related that the lady slept under white satin coverlets, and between linens edged with lace, that would put to shame the baroness's finest state toilet trimmings. The toilet-tables glittered with gold and silver ornaments, and the hand-glasses and cases were inlaid with diamonds—"such a lot of them! more than the mistress ever owned."

"Fudge!" said Robert, who knew all about it, of course. "Imitation, every one of them; or Bohemian, at the most! And what if they are real? The mistress said they had lost everything during the American war; possibly they saved these few valuables from the wreck; but how long will they be able to keep them? When they can't get us to support them any longer—and surely they won't stay here forever—then these stones will go, one after the other. For people must live—and money, they have none; that is an established fact. Mind what I tell you; this thing will go on at our expense, until our gracious mistress puts an end to it in a hurry."

The wrath of the prophesying Robert was tremendous when the grand piano was brought into the house, that Lady Mercedes had "fetched from over the sea." A dog and a piano at Schillingscourt! two outlaws, that were allowed no foothold there. When! oh, when would the mistress return and the fun begin? The close-mouthed negroes were another source of grievance to the other servants. They both spoke a tolerable German, but could never be induced to gossip about their mistress and her circumstances—a direct question brought a simple "yes" or "no," and Minna, who was wrapped up in her mistress and her interests, was likewise "tongue-tied," beyond the statement she made in regard to Lady Valmaseda, when questioned about that lady's husband. She informed them that he had fallen in battle, and only wedded an hour before his death, by the chaplain of the regiment. Good Mamselle Birkner wept tears of sympathy for the widowed

bride, who became an object of tender interest to the listening males; but it made the lady none the less unapproachable. In fact, they became more shy of her when, in passing, her velvet black eyes happened to fall upon any of them with their coldly foreign glances. Only once daily she left her apartments to promenade in the double avenue. She had never been in the garden where the studio was, although she had been irresistibly attracted by the familiar leaves and flowers behind the glass panes of the garden-house and the lovely spray from the fountain. But she resisted the inclination bravely, and turned as if to count the trees that formed the avenue. The master of Schillingscourt respected most strictly the invisible barrier behind which this daughter of the tropics had isolated herself, as if averse to come in contact with anything German. He avoided meeting her; for him a brighter existence had dawned with the arrival of the children; the easel stood deserted, and the palette showed no moist pigment.

If the baroness could see that the grinning people remarked when they saw him with Pauly lifted high up in his arms, showing her the birds' nests in the trees, and permitting her to pull his wavy whiskers, or romp with her and José, and like a happy boy play at throwing pebbles into the fountain lakelet, to see "who could throw the furthest," while laughter mingled with their childish joy!

"How can any human being laugh like that, with such an owl for a wife?" grumbled Lucille, as she skipped by her sister-in-law in the avenue.

It was intolerably hot, but under the shade of those trees there was no occasion to use the little parasol, so Donna Mercedes closed and threw it on a table near. She had, owing to the intense heat, not changed her morning-dress of India muslin. The soft, white material, that fell veil-like about her person, brought out her pale creole complexion, and the heavy hair, caught low in the neck in a net, shone black as a raven's wing. She could readily be taken for a type of the women of whom it was said lived in Sybarite luxury—pampered plantation princesses, whose tiny feet floated heedlessly over prostrated slaves as if they were passing over a carpeted floor, but in whose small hands slumbered a power almost masculine, that could be brought to bear in chastisement upon its object with sudden energy.

Her glance was less circumscribed than usual to-day. She knew that the baron had left the house for the city, and not a servant happened to be about. There stood the atelier, with its white walls upon a background of clustering pines, with

their fringes of pale-green cones. Adjoining it was the hot-house, from the glass panes of which gleamed and reflected the golden glistening sun. Thousands of centifolia blossoms nestled in their native hedges; corn-flowers, buttercups, and great, round-headed clover were waved into variegated billows by the gentle breeze; lavender and thyme exhaled their sweet odors upon the air. The little silvery water-run that fed the fountain was bordered with pale blue forget-me-nots. Away over yonder was a dense thicket, as it appeared to the ranging eye. It was the edge of the Cloister estate. Within it were splendid fruit-trees in abundance, but not one ornamental shrub. From thence came a strong smell of cabbage, beans, and other vegetable scents, from which whole clouds of butterflies fled, to feast upon the blossom-honey of Schillingscourt gardens.

That horrid Cloister estate! The shingles on the weather-beaten, slanting roofs were crooked and moldy. Through their innumerable cracks the hay and straw tufts pressed themselves. The old stone wall lay crumbling in ruins wherever the heavy, creeping ivy had not mercifully hidden its decay. The barn-yard racket came over upon the summer wind, bearing also its complement of smells, and there was a decided curling of a pair of lovely lips as Donna Mercedes perceived it. Little José was playing with a white rabbit that had been given him by the coachman. Intensely delighted with his present, he followed it about under the Palm Avenue, but suddenly it made a dash for the tall grass, and disappeared before the little fellow could reach it, impeded as his short legs were by the entangling green element.

Pirate had been, so far, a silent and wondrously amiable witness of his white rival's antics, from his position of repose on the steps of the hot-house, but the moment José began to run after the rabbit he bounded into the grass on the chase also. The rabbit leaped for dear life and made for cover in the open door of the hot-house, its pursuers following like mad. An instant later there was a grand crash within. José screamed, and the cry was echoed by his mamma. Donna Mercedes hastened toward the scene. The rabbit had hidden behind some plants in tubs, and Pirate, in pressing through the place with his big body, had upset a large plant that went splashing into the basin of a small fountain, whipping, with its waxen solid foliage, the water upon all its surrounding plants, until they trickled with millions of diamond sparks and scattered a perfect wave upon the marble flags. Lucille had retreated to the door, and shook the water from her clothes and

curls, and carefully mopped her dripping face with her dainty handkerchief while scolding José; but directly after burst into a hearty laugh, as Pirate upset, in shaking the water from his back like a drenched lion, several of the smaller plants, and then took to flight as if conscious of the mischief he had done.

Mercedes remained standing on the threshold.

"What are you doing here, Lucille?" she asked, severely.

"Good heavens! I am amusing myself; have you any objections?" the little lady retorted, snappishly, as she stooped to pick up an album that lay upon the floor within the wet radius. "I think the monks must have put poppy-seeds into the corner-stone, when Schillingscourt was built, for tedium gapes at a body from every hole and corner in the house. But I'm not going to sit like a sleepy-head and grow fat before my time; don't expect it from such a nature as mine. I shall escape the bore wherever I can."

She opened the album and began to dry the pages that were soaked. "What a pity! see, this bit of water-color landscape is partly obliterated. That good-for-nothing Pirate! I could strangle him for his mean tricks. But what are we going to do about it now?" she queried, with a dubious shrug of her shoulders. "Oh, well, the 'fish-blooded German' is my friend—a friend of the old, delicious times when I was the *enfant gâté* of my mamma's salons, and knew nothing about cotton-bales and that sort of thing. He won't grumble because I 'snooped' about his place a little during his absence."

With these words she clapped the book shut and entered the adjoining atelier.

Mercedes seemed prepared to go back to her promenade, but now paused and involuntarily stared into the room that was separated from the green-house by a glass partition. A green valour curtain was draped and parted in the center to be caught back on either side, thus creating a most pleasing semi-light upon a singularly original scene. The studio ceiling was high; a winding stairway led to a gallery midway along the wall on one side, the entrance to which was covered by a gobelin curtain. Over the railing was negligently thrown a drugget of old Byzantine work, that sent out a perfect ray of colors under the skylight, that were reflected in the polished equipments of a knight's armor, and in Grecian mirrors, and numberless Venetian curiosities. A graceful and picturesque disorder reigned and evidenced the place to belong to a loving collector of antiquities. In a corner lay remains of an ancient altar piece, and fragments of an old but peculiar pattern of an iron railing, and gigantic folio volumes formed rests for the

feet of graceful modern statuettes; cases and tables, marvelously carved, held antique specimens of Egyptian ware, goblets, and glass and silver vessels. Brocatelle curtains hung around that might have served to inclose the couch of some nabob of centuries past. On a stone pedestal stood a large bust of a Roman emperor. Near it was a Japanese screen. Stuffed birds of rare plumage were ranged about, mounted on Theban pillars, alongside of stony sphinx and relief fragments and terra-cotta Pompeian vases, from which sprung fresh green broadly sweeping leaves.

Donna Mercedes found herself at her sister-in-law's side, almost drawn there against her own volition. Lucille was cunningly stowing the ruined sketch-book under a pile of others on a table.

"Well," said she, "what do you think of the bear's den? Don't my friend understand the art of poetic arrangement?"

"Yes, with his wife's money," was the contemptuous reply, as the speaker walked to the easel standing in the middle of the floor; but the further tart speech stopped upon her tongue and she stepped back startled. Perhaps the torchlight in the picture overcame her with its realistic glare as it also disclosed the group of female figures that had taken flight from the palace and sought refuge in the brush. Yes, from the palace four women had fled, but a moment ago awakened from a peaceful slumber, followed by a murderous hand. The protecting darkness had become faithless, and the key to that little portal was wanting. One of the women, evidently a servant, a strong figure, had cast herself upon the ground, and with her fingers under the portal was trying frantically to tear it from its iron hold. She, with the kneeling form of a beautiful young woman with a child in her arms, for whose sake this effort of escape was being made, were somewhat in the shadow. Not so the other two figures, who were so mercilessly exposed by the torch that had been thrown down near them by its frightened and fleeing bearer. She would meet death bravely, this Huguenot and mistress of the old French château, with her snow-white hair, over which she had hastily thrown a black veil in the flight. She knew the bloodhounds of the king would find them however well they were hidden. The scent of fanaticism is keen. She looked no longer upon the faces of her doomed loved ones, but instinctively she placed over the bosom of the young girl clinging to her in a night-dress that had become disordered, a portion of her veil, as the maiden stared with horrified eyes in the direction of their pursuers.

"Ugh! that picture is enough to give one the nightmare," Lucille exclaimed, breaking the impressive silence with a voice shrill enough to embody the idea of the picture. "I left here with the sketch-books on account of the frightfully realistic thing—I took more comfort looking over the sketches in the green-house. Horrible! that picture. Mercedes, what about the 'fish-blood' of a man who can paint like that—don't you think there may be something more than such cold stuff in his brains?"

"Bah! the man sold himself!" Scornfully Mercedes turned away and began to glance over some of the old volumes scattered about, but ever and again her glance wandered from the old-fashioned wood-cuts to the vividly thrilling scene on the easel. Suddenly her eyes were attracted to the gallery at the head af the winding-stairs, the curtain leading to it still rustled from a passing body.

There stood the artist, and the expression of his face told her that he had overheard her remark. An ironical smile hovered about her lips, and her glance never faltered, but met his indignant eyes like one not accustomed to regretting or retracting her utterances. Did not Felix say that he had married, without loving, his "tall cousin," for the purpose of restoring the lost estates to the impoverished Schillings? It would do him good to hear how others judged of such an act, and how it tarnished even his ideals in their opinions. But a rush of blood crimsoned her face after a moment's stare into the face up there; and hastily picking up the long train to her dress, to leave the apartment she had invaded without invitation, she was constrained to make something of an apology for the intrusion.

He came down the steps and she pointed to the greenhouse, saying:

"Pirate has been transgressing. I heard the noise, and fearing your property had been damaged, I inconsiderately became a trespasser myself."

"Your presence required no apology, madame," he rejoined, coldly; "the studio is always open to visitors from home or abroad. An atelier is not a boudoir nor family room." With these words he passed by her as if she were one of the many visitors who came to see some of his celebrated works.

Entering the greenhouse he rearranged the plants that had been upset, and noticed, with angry surprise, that the various fountain sprays were at work forming rainbow showers upon

the surrounding plants. Turning off one after another of the silver pipes, he remarked impatiently:

"I can't imagine what the gardener is thinking about, he is usually so particular in regard to excessive moisture."

"Oh, *cher* baron! that is some of my work," Lucille cried. "I was perfectly entranced with delight when I saw all the pretty streams at play. It was a priceless discovery for me, I assure you! I curled up on the seat here and nibbled orange blossoms. I also rummaged a bit in the studio. Now behold how a little busybody like myself seeks entertainment when it escapes for one precious moment from the trainer's rod. But apropos, dear baron, what has that unfortunate creature been guilty of that she must needs have her eyes put out?"

She hastened into the studio and returned with a canvas stretched on a frame.

The "unfortunate" proved to be a female face surrounded with brown waves of hair that probably lacked the golden sheen the artist contemplated. The features were completed, but a dash of a darkly laden brush had wiped out the eyes, leaving a soulless streak of paint dividing the clear white brow from the finely curved outlines of the lower part of the face. It was evidently an angry blow wielded by a disenchanted hand.

"The poor blind thing excites my curiosity," prattled the little woman. "Were you the monster who did it?—and why so cruel, *cher* baron?"

"I was convinced the eyes did not belong to a Madonna face," was the scowling reply to the "little busybody" who had so indiscreetly "rummaged" among his treasures. He took the frame from her and shoved it under a stand. Lucille laughed slyly. The baron had doubtless been disturbed in some of his private affairs of the heart. Her eyes sought Mercedes, who had calmly resumed her "visitor's privilege," and was looking at the canvas on the easel again. She did not care to pass through the "greenhouse" while her host remained there, and she knew of no other exit. Besides, the little inter-mezzo of the despoiled portrait had chained her attention.

"She can't escape the attraction," Lucille said, pointing to her sister-in-law; "the scene is a reminder of some of those she took part in during the secession war. B-r-r-r!" The little lady shook herself. "Thank God, I saw very little of the murderous incendiarism," she added, cuddling into a low chair, and burying her little toes in a bearskin rug on the mosaic floor at her feet. "When things began to grow serious

Felix took me and the children to Florida, to the remote Zamora estate belonging to Mercedes. South Carolina was devastated, Charleston besieged, and Columbia burned, and I knew nothing of it until Mercedes arrived one day to prepare me for the news—that they would bring Felix directly."

She faltered, and her face became deathly pale. The shocking recollection overcame her, but she skimmed over it with winged lightness. "Mercedes looked surburned and dilapidated as a gypsy," she continued, brushing away a tear. "Felix said she had managed the transportation during the long and tiresome journey like a man. She is made of different stuff from myself—to carry sword and pistol and steal though the woods for the purpose of surveying the enemies' situation, or to bivouac near a camp-fire, is not to my taste at all. But it seems to come natural to the Spanish nature to play the Maid of Saragossa, regardless of beauty or complexion. Mercedes could not sit for Desdemona, as mamma did, with her lovely arms, *cher* baron"—the speaker's eyes glittered maliciously—"for she has a saber cut on the upper part of her right arm, that encircles it like a crimson snake."

The elegant, slender woman with the crimson mark scarcely hidden by the muslin sleeve, stood before the easel still. Baron Schilling followed a sudden impulse and stepped up to her. She lifted her eyes to him as if just awakened from a dream of flame and blood. "Ah, not so, not so should they conquer; who would submit with such lamb-like docility?" She pointed to the scene in utter oblivion of the gossiping of her sister-in-law.

"I intended to portray a woman who faces death for an ideal," the baron replied.

"And me!" she exclaimed, impetuously.

"You battled for proprietary and state rights—"

"Not for supremacy of intellect over the ignorant masses—not for the sacred ground of our beautiful homes—for the principles founded on our ideals?" She turned her back upon him disdainfully and added, bitterly, "What do you know about it here in Germany! You dance blindly before that idol 'Humanity' the northern dissemblers have set up, and believe in the hypocritical mask covering their burning, envying soul, that they might cripple the power of the South, and take from it its leading representative rights, and reduce the proud race to beggary! Oh! holy German rapture! How you delight in the destruction of your white brother to embrace the black!"

"There is a vast difference between cutting the cords that

mercifully releases the creature from bondage, and taking it to our embrace. These dark-skinned human beings—"

"Human beings?" Mercedes scornfully shrugged her shoulders. That slender, graceful, womanly exterior contained a soul of iron prejudice.

"Ah! I comprehend now why the German air, that just now is laden with the stagnant injustice brushed from its dark corners, is so obnoxious to you." The baron gazed keenly into her eyes as he said it.

"I have read something about it, yes, and the 'brushing' is done in the usual radical German style, doubtless." She smiled sarcastically. "And if these reformers of the world happen to sweep away other people's native rights, that matters little to the grand scene-shifters." Her voice trembled with excitement, and she changed the subject suddenly, as if her proud spirit could not endure an emotion that had escaped her reserved tongue. "Do you seriously believe we shall succeed over there?" She inclined her head in the direction of the Cloister House.

"I wish to believe it, because I do not want to lose faith in the beautiful instincts and sense of right that I believe lives in every womanly heart. But I fervently hope that the decisive moment is very remote."

"And why?" Mercedes turned in the door she was about leaving to ask the question, with a look of surprise.

"Can you ask, when you see how happy the children make me? I shall lose my pets when the grandmother is reconciled—and who is ready to resign a joy that illuminates existence—and they love me"—he hesitated—"or do you also grudge the 'German man' this blessing?" The question contained irony notwithstanding its earnestness.

"Bah! How can you talk like that, baron?" Lucille called out from the hot-house. "Grudge! Ridiculous! Is not Donna Mercedes about to throw my children into that horrible cloister den over there?"

Mercedes ignored the remark utterly, but addressed the conversation to the baron.

"I never permit myself to think of going against my brother's last wishes; but I confess to have always hoped the hard-hearted old woman would decline to recognize her children. Then I would claim the rights of guardianship with which Felix invested me, and say: 'They are mine—*my children!*'"

For the moment she was the embodiment of a passionately

tender woman, who would jealously guard her idols from profane hands.

"This waiting, so uneventfully silent, is intolerable to me. I feel an irresistible impulse, sometimes, to take the children to their grandmother, and make an end to the tormenting uncertainty at once. I know it will not do," she responded to his protesting gestures; "but I should like to break the ice—to make one step toward the end in view."

"Will you permit me to examine Felix's papers in the meantime? I am under the impression we shall require some documents bearing upon family matters."

"They are at your command at any time."

They left the hot-house. Lucille jumped up and ran after them. With her hand in Baron Schilling's arm, the party passed through the avenue of palms toward the Column House.

"Ugh! baron, there is that good-for-nothing example of an uncle, peering over the wall again," Lucille exclaimed, when they had reached the house. "Mark my words, he is up to no good, spying over here so frequently. I recollect that hawk's beak and the bushy head well. My falcon eyes and good memory do not deceive me! His face remains in my soul as if photographed there. There, it is gone; as it always vanishes when I stare at it. The old fox smells a rat. He is entirely too much interested in this side of the wall for the good of the inhabitants. Mind what I tell you!"

Donna Mercedes had made the room with the carved panels cheerfully habitable. A Steinway grand piano stood on one side of the room, and another blank space had been filled out with a handsome escritoire whose brackets and shelves were filled with books and bric-à-brac.

From one of its private compartments she took a beautifully inlaid casket and laid the contents on the table before Baron Schilling, saying:

"Here are the papers Felix brought from this country when he came to America, and this is his marriage-certificate, received from the minister in Columbia, who performed the ceremony; these are the children's baptismal certificates. These three documents are invaluable, for they could not be replaced were they lost. The church registers were destroyed with the burning of Columbia; and this is—"

"The certificate of poor Felix's death;" the baron finished the faltering sentence with tremulous accents himself. "Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, turning around, "do the mice make such noises in broad daylight?" But the rattling in the wall had ceased again.

"Oh, yes—mice!" reiterated Lucille, mockingly, as she made all speed to leave the room.

CHAPTER XV.

In the meantime José had punished the overzealous Pirate by locking him in his "den," a small room in the rear of the atelier; and then, with tearful delight, hugged his frightened little rabbit to his breast, watching in wonderment the tame pet as it devoured the clover out of his hand. The child's favorite play-ground was around the lakelet under the linden shade, where the bees hummed over him in the foliaged roof, and the fish cut the water with their gleaming bodies when they came to the surface in the chase after crumb or fly, and the ducks waddled out, tired with their sailing, to rest their bronze, glowing bulk upon the soft grass. To this retreat the happy little fellow carried his white pet, and carefully deposited it upon the grass and stretched himself beside it, to caress and gaze into its mild, pink eyes, and watch the wonderful play of its long, transparent ears, until startled by a screeching shout of laughter.

Over in the Cloister yard, in a pear-tree, close to the hedge fence, sat Master Guy. His long, thin legs dangled in the air, and his sharp, white teeth glistened in his laughing mouth like some preying animal's.

"Oh, what a booby! what a sillybub!" he shrieked, derisively; "the fool thinks, 'wonder what he's got!' Say, don't you know it's nothing but a common cunicule?"

"A cunicule?" The little fellow repeated the new word in strange accents, looking from the boy to the rabbit in surprised doubting. The boy was the strangest marvel to him, sitting on that elevated seat as unconcernedly as if he were on a chair. Now he turned on all fours and scrambled along the limb with the rapidity of a monkey, slid down the trunk, and disappeared for an instant; then followed the rustling and crackling of branches, and the bristling head reappeared near the ground in the hedge; then Master Guy stood upon his thin legs and ran toward the lake. His presence here had the same effect it created in the Cloister yards; the rabbit ran into the boscage, and the ducks dived with affrighted cries into the water.

"Let it go, you stupid!" Guy exclaimed, blocking José's way as he turned to catch his pet again. The little fellow obeyed, and stood gazing in amazement at the bold boy, who

could not have been more than a year older than himself, though he was a head taller.

Jose had never had a boy playmate, and here one suddenly appeared, who could climb with such wonderful agility, and who crept through a hedge as if it were the easiest thing in the world; and, besides, possessed the important knowledge that a rabbit was his nothing but a common cunicule.

"They know me!" Master Guy remarked, pointing to the scared ducks. "Watch me, I'm going to give 'em a dose smack on their back!" and faithfully the well-directed gravel stones set the alarmed creatures to beating the water with their wings, and shrieking for dear life, while Guy yelled like mad, and clapped his thin, sunburned hands for joy.

José's admiration was boundless; he stared as if fascinated at this extraordinary boy with the little cunning eyes, self-complacent manners and rude speech, caught from his stable-yard associates.

"There, they've had enough for to-day," he said, sending a last pebble into the water. "Come along, now! I want to show you my lapins. That'll open your eyes. They are something different, I guess, from your mean little cunicule."

José looked dubiously shy at the spot in the hedge from whence the boy had come. There was no opening visible.

"I can't get through," said he, timidly.

"Oh, fudge! I can get through. I opened the place myself, and am over here every day when nobody's about. Come along. It's right easy."

He ran to the hedge, parted the branches, and vanished in no time.

José's heart beat fearfully with mingled fear and secret delight, the thorns tore his hair, and his blue cashmere clothes fared badly; but the green tunnel came to an end upon an onion-bed before long.

What a new world opened here to the little fellow. No winding gravel paths, and lawns and iron furniture in shaded avenues; no lakelets and fountains. Among those vegetable rows there was no space for romping childhood. The only spot left free for grass was covered with bleeching linen. Everything was suggestive of economy and labor—without a beautifying element. That was the reason Master Guy crept through the hedge. The only thing to attract the childish eye was the heavily borne-down berry bushes, with their fruit ripening in the sun.

Guy picked up the whip he had left under the pear-tree,

and slashed at the bushes in passing, until the lettuce-beds they bordered were strewn with leaves and fruit.

"They aren't fit to eat yet," he remarked, with a greedy look at the green berries that tasked his patience so long.

He made directly for the middle door of the back building. It did not look inviting, hanging crooked upon it's dragging hinges, so weather-beaten and gray. José had no idea it could be so dark as the darkness that loomed behind it. He clutched at the tall boy's velvet blouse as it closed upon them.

"You great lubber; I do believe you are afraid! Take your hands away!" commanded his companion, beating them off. "This is our wood-shed where I keep my lapins."

The stamping of horses' feet could be heard. The dairy air came through cracks and broken boards, and daylight began to glimmer through the little iron-barred windows, covered with grape-vines on the garden side. This uncertain light fell upon the inclosure where the lapins were kept, under the rickety stairway to the floor above.

Guy took the unhappy rabbits by the ears, and swung them through the air as he mounted the steps, José following closely upon his heels. The little fellow, who had been guarded like a prince from the moment of his birth, now clambered over gaping floors, up ladders and neck-breaking steps, unconscious of his danger, without a word of complaint, and trying manfully to walk as heavily and courageously as his brave leader. But his footstep, nevertheless, does not ring and resound as heartily; for his shoes are not "heeled" with such "wonderful little iron shoes" as those of his companion.

Oh, how grand it was to be a regular boy for once! No Jack or Deborah to hamper, chide and warn everlastingly; no danger of stepping on some lady's long trail at every move, particularly mamma's, and Minna's, who always made such a fuss about it. The fresh-mown hay was splendid to wade in up to the knees; and how charmingly startling it was to have a hen fly suddenly from a nest and run cackling away, leaving the lovely white eggs exposed. How beautifully those myriad particles of gold followed the streak of sunshine that came in through a leakage in the roof. Some of the shingles were weather-beaten enough to leave a view of the yard, where chicken and turkey strutted, and several calves trotted awkwardly about under the shade of a tree in which so many birds were busily nesting; and over from the corner of a room, the door of which stood partly open, came springing a large cat, as if she wanted to attack them; but Guy's swinging whip sent her flying up the rafters.

"Ah, ha! Miez has got kittens," he cried, rushing toward an old broken basket, containing three wee little kittens. "I must tell papa at once. Fritz will have to drown them—and then we will have such fun!"

José huddled down by the basket, and gazed with beaming eyes upon the pretty little pussies, regardless of Guy's remarks. This was even a lovelier sight than the nest of young wrens Uncle Arnold had shown him the other day.

He stroked them tenderly and somewhat timidly at first; but this girlish gentleness provoked Guy.

"What a granny you are!" he scoffed. "The booby treats the beasts like Aunt Teresa treats her young turkeys."

He grabbed one of them and tried to make it stand on its feet; but it only spread its weak legs into a broad straddle and cried pitifully. This brought the mother into the room with a fierce leap, but she must have had some experience with Guy's lash, for at sight of the whip she sprung up the rafters again and ran along the ledge on which a lot of old boxes and broken crockery stood, and sent them clattering to the floor, in trying to escape the yelling boy with his active whip. "Hu, hu!" he screamed, and the cat scrambled wildly down the rafters once more, and fled out of the door.

José's tender nature was shocked and grieved by this brutal conduct. He placed the kitten back upon its bed of rags and watched the cruel chase with dread-expanded eyes. He saw the boy still chasing the cat, and heard his step following in the adjoining room, and turned his attention to the pretty kittens, glad that the noise had stopped. He smoothed the rags under them as Deborah was in the habit of smoothing his pillow when he went to bed at night; and was delighted with the sunbeam that fell upon his stroking hands from the paneless window of the store-room. Then he held them up and bathed them in the sunlight, until his attention was attracted by the bird that lighted upon the sill to devour the fly it had in its bill, and peered with its bead-like black eyes into the place, twittering all the time so cunningly. The kittens began to cry louder, too, and the boards creaked strangely whenever he moved, and everything had become so still. That restless boy should certainly have returned. It seemed long, very long, since he had gone chasing after poor puss.

The child turned around innocently, to see what he might be doing so quietly. But no boy was to be seen, and the place where the door had been appeared like a shadowy lot of faded scrolls and flourishes, through which the other room could not be seen. He could not comprehend the situation, that

oddly painted space. There was, of course, a door that would open, and of course the boy was just on the other side of it.

José tried the door, but it would not open; there was no handle nor lock to be seen, but where the lock once had been there was a little hole through which he could look into the dusky outside, where all was deathly still—he could not get out through that hole, and the door would not move under his hands.

He uttered a soul-harrowing cry, but held his breath the next instant—some one appeared to move outside of the door.

"Oh, boy, please, good boy, let me out!" he wailed, after pressing close to the door in a keenly listening attitude.

No reply, no one approached to release him from the four imprisoning walls.

He beat with his little fists upon the door, crying bitterly, and calling in heart-rending accents upon Auntie Mercedes—Jack—Deborah, upon all who were ever so ready to come a this slightest cry—until he sunk exhausted upon the dusty floor. There he cowered up in the "hawk's nest," also a sweet strayed "humming-bird," trembling with an indescribable fear, that once oppressed that other helpless one, if he had known it, who was now sleeping an eternal sleep under the magnolias so far away! He had been familiar with this old store-room, with its age of odds and ends, whose days of usefulness were past—this resort for moths that hovered in clouds above the old spinning-wheels and reels that had served the linen closets of the Wolframs for generations; old chair frames, upon which the cloth-weaver's family had sat three hundred years ago when they first migrated to the Cloister House. In one corner was a collection of coarse, broken toys, headless dolls with which the little flaxen-haired girl-babies of the unhappy wife of the senator had played.

The sunshine retreated from the little window. The bird had flown at the first affrighted cry. The kittens had gone to sleep cuddled together on their rags, and only lifted their sleepy heads when José broke out anew in sobbing lamentations. The little fellow thought of all the awful ghost stories Deborah was so graphic in relating, and they glared at him from every object about the room, they inhabited the old clock frame, and gave life to the old doll trunks with their broken arms and legs; he also thought of the stories he had heard about lost children and their frightful adventures.

"I'll never go away again, auntie, never, never!" he sobbed, as if he were in her arms once more pleading for pardon.

The hopeless silence outside continued, but behind him the boards creaked, and lightly tapping feet seemed to move across the floor, papers rattled, and the broken crockery clattered. A bold rat had asserted a proprietary right, notwithstanding the presence of the cat family, and had come to explore among the dishes for a feast. This was a more horrible thing than ghosts to the child, who had a natural antagonism toward "mice"—and here was such an awfully big one, who might jump upon him any moment.

He sprung from the floor with a loud shriek that sent the rat into its hiding-place, but the child ran about half frantic, for fear if he paused the creature would return. On, on, panting and screaming; but suddenly the bolt was withdrawn from outside and the door torn open.

A large woman appeared before him, and, with outstretched arms, he ran to her, crying: "Don't shut the door again—don't—don't shut the door—I will be a good boy—never—run away again."

The woman's face was deadly pale, and a tremor ran through her form, as the childish arms were cast about her waist. She took him by the hand and led him out into the entry; and there was that big boy who had come from behind a chimney, and danced with excess of joy until his iron heels echoed his gyrations. "How do you like it in there, hey? Do you want to play with the kittens any more?" he shouted.

"You coaxed him up here, and locked him in, did you?" the woman asked, in a strangely hoarse voice.

"Of course—who else?" he retorted, saucily lashing the air with his whip, and blinking impudently at her with his little sharp eyes. "But what are you bothering about it for; is it any of your business? I can't bear the dainty cub, he is awful green, and follows one like a puppy—he wears a lace collar, the ape, and his shoes are—"

The speech was abruptly cut short. The woman made a quick grab for him, and with her strong hand administered several sharp blows, then set him upon his feet and pushed him toward the open door leading into the house. Amazement made the boy mute at first. In all his life before he had never been chastised—who would have dared to lay hand upon the senator's idolized son? He only knew that others feared him and his whip, and now it was his turn to scream—but only after he had been set upon his legs again by the brawny hand that had turned him so unexpectedly—and he ran like mad, howling like an animal, down the stairs, and the nearer he got to the Cloister House the louder he yelped. The servants came

running from all directions, and the senator rushed out to gather his heir in his arms.

White with alarm, he carried the boy into his room, and the hand that passed quietly over the child's head trembled perceptibly.

Master Guy was aware that he was subject to fits. He had heard the maids say so and imitate the spasmodic twitching, and since that time the attacks were more frequent. Whenever things failed to move as he wished, he curled over on his back, and twitched arms and legs with commendable accuracy to the requirement of fits. At this moment a convulsive rage really shook his frail body; he beat about him with hands and feet, and bent his head back into the sofa pillow, upon which his father had placed him. His condition was certainly alarming, but the little eyes squinted, strangely cunning and observant, from under their lids, as the senator hastened toward a closet where the medicine was kept for such occasions.

The screaming was apruptly hushed, the struggling ceased as suddenly. The senator turned, startled, to see what caused it, and found his son sitting up staring at the opposite wall. One of the rudely carved saints had parted with his arm that was stretched out in blessing; a broad black gap separated it from his body.

"Papa, the wall is caving in," he cried.

With an almost wild bound, the senator cleared the step to the gallery. The next moment the panel closed under the pressure of his hands as noiselessly as it had parted.

"You little dunce!" he exclaimed, coming down again, "that wall is not going to cave in so easily, but the shrunken wood is cracking; we must have it attended to."

Master Guy was a little skeptic; his keen intelligence and the listening and spying nature was not readily cheated by what his elders said; there was not much of the "child's faith" in his cunning composition. He squinted doubtingly at the saint whose arm was restored in lingering benediction above the kneeling woman's head; but he kept his thoughts about the matter to himself, and began to lament again when his father went to the table to prepare the medicine.

"Papa, Aunt Teresa nearly beat the life out of me."

The man wheeled about, as if he could not have heard aright.

"She beat and pushed me awfully—as if it was my fault because that little fool followed me like a dog."

"Who? Of whom are you speaking, my son?" the frightened senator asked, thinking his boy had become delirious.

"I mean that strange boy from Schillingscourt—the booby in blue. He ran after me clear into our store-room," Guy replied, tossing himself about impetuously.

"He is in this house—upstairs—with your Aunt Teresa?"

Guy nodded, and spilled most of the medicine in the spoon, held to his lips just then.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE the screams of her hopeful nephew had ceased to echo around her, the indignant blood had receded from Mrs. Lucian's face, leaving it cold and stoney as usual. She wiped the dust and tears from José's face with a corner of her blue linen apron, but never looked into the swollen eyes, nor spoke a kindly word to the child, and when his soft little hand crept into her labor-hardened one in leaving the dark place she shuddered as if a snake had curled there.

It was just about this hour of the afternoon when the officer's wife arrived secretly at the Cloister House from her deserted Berlin home.

A little blonde-haired boy had clung just like this one to her hand, and two such little hesitating feet kept time with the resolute step, when she exchanged a brilliant life for this hermitage, simply to punish and disgrace her husband. At that time she fancied she could lead the boy away from a frivolous life for all time, and keep him at her side forever. Shocking experience had taught her different. Did she think of this now, or what were the thoughts that flitted through the brain under the silvery diadem of hair, worn still as the once beautiful brown braid had been when it was so much admired?

She led the child into the gable-room, with stained closet-doors and old-fashioned furniture, just as she had led her own boy upon that evening to wash the dust from his travel-stained face, and exchange the blue jacket so despised by her brother for a plain blouse. The great dark eyes were veiled by the long lashes as she wet the towel to wipe the tearful face carefully, as if she would guard her fingers from touching his little cheeks.

"Hush!" said she, shortly, when he began to speak of Aunt Mercedes. He looked longingly at the water-flask; his throat was parched from crying and inhaling the hot, dusty air of the store-room, but he did not venture to speak again. Gentle and obedient, just like the boy who played over in that corner five-and-twenty years ago, and whose little bed stood behind that coarse curtain in the other room.

She prepared a drink of some berry syrup, wine and water, and held it to the child's lips without looking at him. This refreshing drink was sometimes given to faint and weary travelers who paused at the Cloister House. Why not also to this strange child, who had been so illy used by the son of the host? He was almost perished—for he grasped the glass eagerly and drank the contents to the very last drop. Then he lifted his little arm to offer a grateful embrace, as he was in the habit of thanking those who were kind to him; but the woman may not have noticed the action. She set the tumbler on the table, and took a brush hanging near, and removed the particles of straw and dust from the blue cashmere suit, and once more passed the wet towel over the flushed little face. But the beautiful gold-gleaming curls that clung sweat-moist to the forehead were not touched. None had ever witnessed a quivering of the nerves in this woman; but she had misdirected the water in pouring it into the glass for the child, and now the brush fell from her hands twice. Then she pushed the little fellow toward the door with impatient haste.

Heavy footsteps were mounting the stairs, and a closely cropped gray head became visible.

"The deuce!" exclaimed its owner. "I see you have company."

The senator must have been unaccustomed to running upstairs; he seemed very much out of breath, but when he reached the full light of the hallway at the head of the steps, he was the same picture of robust health as of old, with an added restlessness to his energetic manners. But his eyes appeared sunken under their gray, overhanging brows, where they seemed to glow in their sockets with an unnatural fire, unlike the old, calm, world-challenging glance. These burning eyes flashed upon José, who retreated a step nearer to the woman, and laid close hold upon the hand that she had hidden in the folds of her dress, when this little one was extended on leaving the room, with a mute appeal to be led through the strange hall.

"Whose boy is that?" was the senator's curt question.

"How should I know?" was the short answer. "I heard a child's cry from my room, and went over to see the cause. I found that your Guy had been amusing himself by locking a strange child into our lumber-room."

"And for this you ventured to abuse him!" the senator cried furiously.

"Abuse him? I simply gave him a few well-deserved marks." Her reply was coldly unmoved, and brought the en-

raged man to his senses. There was no headway to be made by blustering at this calmly deliberate woman.

"I never punished him in such a brutal manner myself."

"More's the pity—the boy will never be good for anything!" Such an uncomplimentary criticism had never escaped her lips before. She was certainly not herself.

"Ah! you really think not, Teresa?" The sun-browned face grew a shade more red, and a sardonic smile hovered about his mouth. "What a calamity it would be if my son should also take a notion to run away with a dancing jade some night."

His sister snatched her hand out of the little clinging fingers with one wrench; her lips became compressed like iron.

The senator watched her closely and smiled ironically while twisting at his beard.

"Oh, yes—I am well aware that my son is not to your taste. He is far too intelligent for his age, and knows how to assert himself like a true Wolfram, who never stoops to fawn and flatter. A jackanapes like that"—he pointed to José—"would suit you better—the devil only knows what you imagine he may be—"

"The child of strangers, nothing else."

"Of course the child of strangers, what else should he be—we have no relatives. I merely suggested, since my Guy does not suit you—that this tow-headed boy had perhaps put a crotchet of some kind into your head. How did he get into my house, if not through you? It is not to be supposed he was wafted in like a snowflake."

"Guy must have brought him in."

"Guy—and always Guy—the poor fellow, is the criminal, and gets the beating; that youngster is the innocent lamb. How did you get here?" he snapped wrathily at the child, who started back in affright, unable to utter a word. "Will you answer me?" he shouted, making a threatening motion toward him.

The woman, with a glare like a tigress-mother at the attacking party, placed herself between the trembling boy and her brother, who involuntarily retreated before the look in her face. The next instant the face was icily calm, as she quietly remarked: "Would you add to the terror of this strange child, who has already been scared nearly to death by your tricky son?"

She bent over José to question him herself, but there seemed to come no language to her tongue in which she could address this child, who gazed up at her with his beautiful, appealing

eyes, so she only compressed her lips more closely and turned away.

But José replied of his own accord now, feeling himself protected by the woman.

"I crept through the hedge with that big boy. He always creeps through there and throws stones at the ducks. He said he wanted to show me his lapins."

"Indeed," the senator remarked, strangely puzzled by his sister's manner, "there is but one hedge between our place and Schillingscourt. A nice discovery! My son on Schilling's property. I'll have the place barricaded with impenetrable thorns. I recollect now of seeing this will-o'-the-wisp moving over there among the trees. He belongs to that American family, Von Valmaseda, they call themselves. The husband is said to be a watering-place gambler, and leaves his family—to the scandal of decent people—without a cent of money, upon the charity of the Schillings." The information came as glibly from his bearded lips as if he were a veritable gossip-monger. "The Schillings were always spendthrifts. Adventurers always found a welcome there. But the baroness won't put up with it—she declined to mix with such doubtful guests, and cleared out."

Mrs. Lucian's glance wandered from the wasp and a couple of blue-bottle flies that were beating against the closed windows of the large room before the door of which they stood, until her brother had ended, then she turned her eyes keenly upon him, and said:

"What is it our business? We are not in the habit of concerning ourselves about the Schillingscourt visitor."

"There was a time when you did, Teresa—when the man in the royal regimentals was angling for the pretty, stupid, Wolfram goldfish. But the grass has grown of that time, and I have lived down the disgrace; but I am once more concerned, since Guy has hunted up a companion who hails from Schillingscourt. A nice association, truly! And you—can you forget that that house is the source of all you have had to endure?—that the Schillings are to blame for your totally wrecked life? I should think the very air from the place would offend you. For your sake alone have I taken pains that not so much even as the dust tracked by a foot from the hateful ground should be carried into my premises, and here you are taking this luckless creature into your room to comfort and caress it."

"Caress!" She laughed wildly, drawing the big blue apron through her hands as if to wipe out the very memory of the little fingers that had clung to them. "You ought to know

that it was useless to remind me of the past. Have I for one moment of my life forgotten that I am a Wolfram, tell me? the daughter of my father and all the Wolframs before him? They may also have made mistakes, but when they had recognized their error, did they ever fail to follow the road they considered proper, though it led them through the torments of hell?"

She pressed her large white hand to her breast and passed on to the stairs, where she remained standing again, and said: "Don't trouble yourself about me—I shall go on to the end with the task before me. But, be on your guard; you are but the shadow of yourself! No one longed more than I for an heir to our ancient and reputable race—but I did not dream that nature could change, or deem it possible blood could so alter. But this I do know: among all the sons that have been born on the Cloister estate, there have been none so maliguantly cruel or maliciously destructive as your Guy. Had there been we should not be where we are to-day—our property would have been scattered to the four winds. And thus is he permitted to grow up untrained—you let him do with you as he pleases—you tremble at every pretended spasm he delights to torment you with. All, everything, is to fall into his hands—I believe you would sell your soul to the evil one for this boy's sake." She paused as if frightened at her own agitation and the words that made her brother gasp with rage. But she retracted nothing, and added, with increased severity: "If you expect to see the Wolframs prosper in honor in the future, as in the past, then do your duty as a father—apply the rod!"

She motioned for José to follow her, and passed down the stairs.

It was just six o'clock. The foaming milk-buckets stood on the table—the people were pressing around it to be waited on.

"This child belongs to Schillingscourt," said she to one of the maids. "Take him over and open the gate for him. You are not to go in."

She walked to the table without a glance at the astounded people who were staring at the pretty little fellow, who turned his flushed face once more toward her as he was going away, and called out:

"Good-night, kind woman!"

If she heard she made no sign; but for once in the history of the dairy business on that Cloister House table, the precious milk overflowed the jug of a customer, and ran streaming in a little white river on the floor.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE girl opened the garden gate to the aristocratic house, and hurried back again according to orders; and José ran along the walk to the Column House. Everything was hushed about the garden, and the crunching of the gravel under the little fellow's feet could be plainly heard, and attracted the attention of Deborah, who came rushing toward him as fast as she could move her corpulent body.

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! Praise God, is that you, honey?" she said, with tears streaming over her black cheeks. "Oh, darling, where have you been? My sweet honey-boy has been out in the strange streets—my bad, naughty boy. Praise God! you are here again, and didn't get run over and lost; and Deborah, your poor Deborah, and Jack, would be to blame for not taking better care of their sweet, pet boy; and they are dragging the lake for our darling, among the fishes, and poor dear auntie is dying with grief!"

During these chidings and caressings she had gathered him up in her arms and ran toward the lake. There the master and the people of the house were collected, dragging the pond. The "handsome Spanish lady" stood by, leaning like a white statue against a linden-tree, holding in her hand José's hat, that had been found there. This woman, who had worn a saber and carried a revolver while guarding a wounded brother through a desolated country, and "directed the transportation like a man," was not one to give her anguish voice in lamentations.

"Here he is!" Deborah cried.

The words fell with the force of a bombshell among the little crowd. Every face lighted up with joy at sight of the child, and they looked at each other with the relief that would have said: "Why, how could we for one moment imagine he was drowned?"

The sudden transition from deepest grief to boundless joy found no expression on Mercedes's lips. The stony stare that had watched the waters beneath which the precious one might be, had not yet vanished from her face when she turned to meet the child. Her dress was draggled and dusty from the search, the net holding that thick "gypsy hair" was torn from the bushes where the anxious one had sought the lost boy. With tottering steps she moved toward the little fellow,

as still flushed and swollen-eyed he crept into her embrace. Her voice was severely reproving, but trembled as she said: "José, José, you have been naughty to run away."

José wept and sobbed bitterly, saying, "never, never would he do so again," and told in broken accents his adventure on the Cloister estate, while at a motion from the baron the people dispersed and went about their duties as before. José began to tell about the "bad man who wanted to strike him," and the woman who had told him so sternly to "hush."

The effect upon Mercedes, when she heard this, was intensely exciting. Her southern temperament, curbed generally by her superior sense, now rose in rebellion; she shook off impatiently Deborah's hand that attempted to restore the hair, falling in a great blue-black wave over her mistress's shoulder, to its net. What cared she for outward appearance at this moment!

"What now?" she sharply asked Baron Schilling, who walked beside her and gently placed his hand over José's mouth, who was dwelling feverishly upon the "frightful great mouse" that came out of a corner after the big boy had locked him into that awful room.

Her eyes were lifted angrily, but through a misty veil, to the gentleman, who replied, quietly:

"Be firm."

"I can not and will not!" she exclaimed, pressing the boy to her breast passionately. "The sacrifice is too great. I can not battle with such coarse natures for that which Felix certainly overestimated. The task is more than I can bear."

"Do we not bear it together? Am I not here?" he asked, reproachfully.

The kindliness contained in the words affected Mercedes, but her pride conquered the emotion. "Do we not bear it together?" he had said, and thereby implied an association between them that was distressing under the circumstances. This man had a wife, who deserted the house meanly for the very purpose of preventing a possible association. Notwithstanding the woman's title, she was but a girl, spirited, fearless, and energetic as a man, but the modesty of true womanhood made her sensitive as a Mimosa. A feeling of shame and repulsion overcame her; she made no answer, but flashed an expressive glance upon him from her great black eyes.

"I am not exactly the children's legal guardian, but Felix's request and my promise to him give me certain rights that I shall maintain to the uttermost. From this attitude I question whether my personal feelings are to be considered when

coarse natures offend at the first contact, and whether I have the right to let my courage wane from individual reasons. Such feeling must be left out of the question. Felix died poor."

Mercedes started, as if this plain speech had wounded her to the soul—a deep crimson mantled her pale cheeks.

"True, he did not leave a dollar of ready money. The property my father left him lies all in weed-overgrown plantations in a devastated land. They are no longer valuable since the hands that worked them wear spurious rings upon the fingers. Felix became beggared like the whole financially ruined south. Bah! what is the use of talking about it? According to the German sense of justice, this is but the consequent expiation for the old wrongs."

She turned away indignantly, and lifted her arms to arrange her hair tidily. In this position her beautiful figure was an exquisite sight for an artist.

"You justify your line of conduct—I think—principally upon the grounds of this poverty."

"Most assuredly—I consider it my duty to help these children to their rightful inheritance—at any sacrifice."

"Oh, this miserable money!" The expression was accompanied with the same contemptuous shrug that she used in the studio when she said: "With his wife's money."

The baron did not stand before her now like a dreamy artist, but like one of those solid, strong-souled men up in the picture-gallery, that represented characters not readily turned from a purpose once undertaken.

"Yes, this miserable money!" he repeated; "but I do not deny its power any more than Felix did when he so fervently hoped his children might some time obtain his inheritance—and he was right, they will need it. I am aware that I shall be misjudged for this expression; but I can stand it."

Her lip curled, and ignoring the last remark, she asked:

"Do you then think the children will starve without this old woman's money?"

Baron Schilling smiled. "They have a very energetic auntie, who would, in case of necessity, do menial work rather than have her darlings suffer. More than this, I do not know; nor do I care to pry into the circumstances, because they would not alter my views. I calculate upon the power of endurance required to brave the forces that will cross our undertaking"—he hesitated, and his eyes sought the ground—"you are so young."

"But resolute enough to hold faith with the dead," she

added quickly and comprehensively, as her face grew painfully red.

A silence ensued. José was sitting on a garden-bench, at a little distance, telling Deborah of his adventures on the Cloister estate.

The baron changed the subject by asking a question that puzzled him considerably.

"Why do you indulge the little woman in her fancy that she is rich—very rich? The truth will have to be told her some time."

"Not necessarily; as long as she does not separate her fortunes from mine. Lucille would die if she thought she was no longer the mistress of unbounded wealth. Felix loved her unto death. He was more troubled for the future welfare of this pleasure-loving being than for his little children. I gave him my sacred promise that I would watch over her, and thus I look upon her rather as an elder sister to the little ones, a character she decidedly prefers, to that of being a mother. She is very delicate—in fact, physicians declare she is in the first stages of consumption. I consider it my duty to ward off, wherever I can, any unpleasantly agitating emotion. For that reason I gave strict orders that she should not be informed of José's disappearance until we were certain of his fate."

She called the little fellow to her, and, taking him by the hand, turned once more to the baron, saying:

"Will you accompany me to Lucille? She may have heard a distressing rumor by this time, and is liable to excite herself needlessly—your presence will prevent it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Donna Mercedes was not in the habit of visiting Lucille's apartments. There was no occasion. The meals were served in the general dining-room, notwithstanding Lucille's objections to this arrangement. The setting sun bathed the scene in a glow of golden splendor; but in Lucille's rooms the curtains were closely drawn to shut out this glare, and the softer light of night substituted by the brilliance of innumerable jets, issuing from the bronze wall-brackets and chandelier depending from the ceiling, and on each side of the full length mirror between the windows. The scene was suggestive of the presence of a catafalque; but was something very different—it lighted up a stage scene.

Before the mirror hovered a little human butterfly. Over the flesh-colored silk hose she wore a short skirt of yellow

satin; a lavender velvet bodice, embroidered with silver, inclosed the tapering waist; the powdered arms, that waved with every motion of her body, were covered with bracelets, and ribbons fluttered from the white shoulders like wings. It was a dance—it was rather a floating, fairy-like motion, as if the air were bearing the slender figure. Truly, Lucille was an artist of the first rank. Her musical accompaniment was peculiar; and Minna, the maid, stood with her back toward the door in the middle of the room, humming an air, so distinctly accented that it left no doubt of the fact that she was the well practiced orchestra of such rehearsals, and perfectly familiar with the business. She clapped the time with her hands, and moved head and body involuntarily with every motion of the dancer. Both seemed oblivious of little Pauly, who was sitting upon the floor amusing herself with the artificial flowers that had been cast aside when her mamma's flowing locks had been entwined with all they could gracefully hold. The little one was partly undressed, and had twisted a silken scarf about her bare neck after dressing her baby head with a wreath put on sideways.

"Lucille!" exclaimed Mercedes, who had entered with José and the baron.

The little creature turned, affrighted.

"Oh, mamma, you stupid, you forgot to lock the door!" The momentary confusion passed with the reproof. Then she began to laugh merrily.

The baron stroked his beard, greatly amused. This sylph didn't look as if she would swoon from the effects of her son's adventure. He remained with José near the door, but Mercedes hastened to remove the wreath from baby Pauly's head and draw the clothes up over her shoulders, and endeavored to quiet the protesting child while replacing the little shoes and stockings that had been kicked off.

"Lucille, you ought not to let this little one witness such amusements," said she.

"Pshaw! why not? If you imagine I shall consent to having her brought up as stupidly severe as you are training José, you are much mistaken! The poor thing has a miserable babyhood any way, compared to mine. Gracious! What a happy, happy childhood that was! Petted, admired, fairly rolling in elegance, every wish gratified—that is the way I was brought up! Oh, my beautiful, lost paradise!" She lifted her arms toward heaven—those arms had grown so thin—surely the doctors had spoken truly. Lucille was hectic with excitement and her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.

She tore the flowers from her hair and flung them on the floor.

"You call it 'amusements,'" she continued, vehemently. "God knows, it's poor enough amusement—but what is a body to do? Every one to their taste, Donna Mercedes! You drum Bach on your piano, and go into ecstasy over the old noodle. I dance and sometimes enjoy the melancholy delight of reviving the old theater days."

"Your costume is new—perfectly new?"

Lucille whirled upon her toes, and gave a little confused chuckle. The maid stooped to pick up the scattered flowers.

"And what if it is?" The little woman halted in her dance and approached Mercedes. "And what if it is? Does it concern you if I purchase a few yards of satin and velvet? Does it come out of your purse? Oh, Baron Schilling! behold my serenely severe sister-in-law! The lace she is dragging like rags over the floor is more expensive than a queen is in the habit of wearing on her state trains. The extravagance of these cotton queens is fabulous, I tell you! But a poor little object like myself may not even indulge in a new costume for my 'amusement!' It is scandalous to think that my pin-money has been tied up in the guardianship of this Mercedes—and dunce that I am to submit! How do I know by what authority—if authority she has at all—she questions the disposition of my money? I must account for every spool of silk—every pin—"

"You know that I never ask an account of you, Lucille."

Mercedes spoke quietly. There was an expression of pure nobility on her face, unmingled with resentment. "I think you do wrong, however, to overheat yourself in this manner, contrary to the physician's orders. Felix would not permit it."

"Because he was jealous. He could not endure the idea of having others see and enjoy my talents, and certain other persons were just like him. Those doctor wiseheads saw that plainly, and at once sided with the 'powers' of the establishment—certainly! and really believed I could be scared, when they stared at me solemnly and said: 'Your health is endangered.' The smart Aleck!"

Like a naughty, exquisitely graceful child, she mocked the doctors, and finished by a lightning pirouette, and a whirl of gold-colored satin and sheeny gauze.

Mercedes's face was very red when she quietly took Pauly by the hand to leave the room.

But Lucille anticipated the movement.

"Oh, no! Pauly remains with her mamma," said she, de-

cidedly. "You may usurp my place with José. I love him, to be sure, but it seems I have no power to control him. Fate acts blindly in some of her arrangements. To think of a young inexperienced thing like myself being the mother of a great boy. Nonsense! But my pet, my sweet Pauly and I—we belong to each other—as mamma and I did once—so don't try to—"

"Felix gave Madame Valmaseda the legal right to control both children," the baron interrupted, impressively.

Lucille turned upon him with a scornful laugh. "You, too, Brutus!" she exclaimed pathetically. "Well, I might have known it—on the other side all were likewise subservient to this oracle—her father—Felix—and poor Valmaseda. These dark women with their somber airs are sovereign in ruling, cautiously reserved in granting favors—that is the secret of their power. What a cold bride she was!"

"Silence!" said Mercedes with flashing eyes, to the treacherous gossip.

"Good heavens! I'm still, aren't I?" she cried, with a droll semblance of fear. "But Baron Schilling is my friend—a friend of the glorious old times in Berlin—I won't have him drawn into your net—I won't, I say! His life is none too happy, the poor, unfortunate fellow."

"Unfortunate?" the baron queried—"who told you I was unhappy and—"

"Good Lord! I should think you would be, with such a wife. Or has she, perhaps, improved in appearance?" Lucille opened her eyes, seriously interested, but the pale, indignant face that just then swept a lightning glance over the woman who had said "the man sold himself," was startling to the garrulous little lady. Mercedes's countenance was once more expressive of contempt.

"Really, Mrs. Lucian, I am grateful for your tender regard—you are consideration itself—but rest easy on my account; I am perfectly contented with my lot in life."

He placed his hand on the door-knob; José standing ready to escape the moment the door should open, as if the air of the room distressed him.

"We came to tell you that our little runaway had returned safely."

"I see. I suppose he could not be found for a moment, and then there was a great hue and cry. Some one—wasn't it, Robert, Minna?—came to the door to ask if he was here. I didn't think anything more about it. A big boy like him can't get lost as if he were a pin." She approached him with

fairy-like skips, and laid her hand on his head. "Where on earth had you disappeared to, José?" she asked.

The little fellow pressed his face to the door, shook off her hand, and began to cry.

"No, mamma, no! I can't look at you. Put on a long dress; you are not my mamma now—no!"

"You absurd boy!" His mother tried to turn him by force, but the child's nerves seemed to quiver still with the excitement of his adventure; for, unlike his usual gentle compliance, he struggled to escape, crying convulsively meanwhile, his little sister joining in at the top of her voice.

"Great fathers, what a babel!" the mother exclaimed, rushing into the adjoining room with her hands pressed upon her ears, and banging the door shut; while the baron left with José, and Mercedes assisted Minna in quieting Pauly.

"Well, I've got enough of this," Robert said to one of the other servants when the baron had passed with José, and Mamselle Birkner had just returned from handing Deborah cake for the supper-table. "Here we were, all thanking God because the baroness had put that beast Minka out to board, and now I'd give a ten-dollar bill if she was back again, and things were as they used to be. A private kick, or a trifling knock over the beast's head settled her for awhile, at least, and a body got some rest. But now? Why, it's enough to set one crazy. You can't step for the playthings and stuff scattered round, and a body's back is bent double picking up after the trash—and that infernal dog keeps one dodging all the time. I know what I'd like to feed him in his 'big dish of meat'—and those spoiled brats keep the house everlastingly alarmed. First, it is run with poles to fish the boy out of the lake, when he ain't there at all; then it is jump and pick up the squalling girl, who has nothing else to do but fall on her nose; and just now they both howled until my hair rose on end—and no thanks from the high-nosed madame, who hasn't got money enough to pay for what she eats. It costs the master a fortune to keep them, and he pretends he never was so happy in his life as he is now! Oh, if his wife would only drop in on him! She despises children. I never saw her pass one without looking as if she wanted to step on it."

"That's because the Lord never sent her any," Mamselle Birkner apologized.

"Well, may be she has gone to Rome to pray for one," Robert giggled, wittily.

"She is not in Rome any more," the gardener whispered; "she is visiting at the convent—"

The man paused as if the information had escaped him unawares, and when pressed by his curious companions as to where he got his news, he said a "bird had told him." That he spied into an open letter, while attending to the flowers in the baron's studio, he failed to relate; but he winked knowingly when he added: "I think she is coming home soon—then look out! That American family will be sent a-kiting; mind what I tell you!"

"The master will not permit it."

"And, if you please, Mamselle Birkner, to whom does Schillingscourt belong?" the man asked, spitefully.

"To us!" she replied, exasperated. "To us, and not to the Steinbrucks. When we were all together yet—the old baron and Arnold—I should say the young baron—and I—there was no gracious mistress then—and we were as happy as the day was long, and the good old master owned the house. Here he was born, and here he died. We were all faithful and honest. The keys to the cellars were never carried away, as if the house was full of rascals—" she stopped suddenly and stepped respectfully aside as Donna Mercedes passed with little Pauly.

"Beggar princess!" muttered Robert; for the lady moved by with downcast eyes, as if this gossiping humanity were so many statues.

CHAPTER XIX.

LUCILLE locked herself into her room like a pouting child, and would not come to supper. Minna had carried her a waiter laden with refreshments, and was obliged to stay and keep her mistress company; thus she was not aware that the family physician had been called in late in the evening by Baron Schilling to prescribe for José, whose feverishly excited condition increased as the night advanced.

Donna Mercedes had his little bed removed from the nursery into her own room, so that she could watch over him herself, and he fell into quiet slumber, after the doctor's potion had been given, until midnight, when he started up with terror to find himself in a strange room and Aunt Mercedes lying on a bed dressed, and a red light falling on everything in the apartment from the shaded lamp on the table. Every article assumed a terrifying shape to the little fellow, and his head sunk back on the pillow with a leaden weight, and the hot steam came from his burning little body when he moved the bed-clothes up over his face. Surely he heard that "big

mouse" from the Cloister House lumber-room; he rose up in his bed again and looked toward the door, and there he saw a foot; it seemed to be walking on tiptoe; he looked to see to whom this foot belonged that came out of the corner of the window, and he saw a tall figure with a shadowy face, with the hair growing into the brow; it was closely cropped, bristling hair, and the eyes glowed fiercely under the bushy brows; quickly he covered his head with the bed-clothes again; he dared not cry aloud, for fear the man's big hand would fall upon him, but he moaned in the agony of his terror, and Mercedes sprung up and went to his bed. She drew down the clothes, and was frightened at the spasmodic, burning little hands that clutched her own.

"Don't let the big man come, auntie—ring—have Jack bring Pirate!" he moaned.

"You are dreaming, dear," said she, in quivering tones. The fever-heat streamed from his body like a flame, but he dashed her hands away and screamed: "Jack! Pirate!"

Mercedes rang the bell. The two colored people came rushing into the room, and soon the master of the house came also, and stood anxiously waiting for the ominously thoughtful physician to speak, and again and again the little fellow shrieked for help to drive the mouse away, not to let the dreadful man strike him. Then began a long, sad siege. Death stood lingering at the bedside, threatening the last of the race of Lucian. Sometimes he seemed to have stretched his arms over the wildly beating heart. Then the shadows lay upon the beautiful curly head until the features of the child's face were scarcely to be recognized as those of bright little José's. The physicians brought all their skill to bear upon the case, and with singular unity tried to save their patient solely for the young lady with the dark, southern face and tearless, agonized eyes, who listened to their directions with closely compressed lips; who never murmured, and usually declined food and drink, and sat night and day beside the sick-bed.

The little mamma, however, who often stood at the foot of the couch with swollen eyelids, and whispered and gesticulated constantly, was a perfect nuisance to the doctors. She burst into loud motherly lamentation, but with the egotism of a selfish nature. She did not want to suffer this uncertainty. She wanted them to give her comforting words, and when the patient's condition would not admit of it. She declared they had no consideration for her, and threw herself upon the sick child with heart-rending reproaches for those who had brought

her boy to Germany, to this haunted Schillingscourt, to be murdered so cruelly.

Truly, Mercedes's cup of bitterness was overflowing. The mother had to be cared for like a child—a thankless task that she had to bear almost unassisted. Deborah, with her excessive grief for José, was of little use. The poor colored nurse suffered doubly. The servants of the house declared the child must die, because Adam had appeared to him. A perfect panic of fright existed among them since the little fellow had given that awful shriek, on the night he was taken sick, and aroused the whole house with his cries to have that "dreadful man" driven away. Of course, that was Adam's ghost! and they were afraid to go near the room with the carved walls after nightfall, no matter how brilliantly the corridors were lighted. Deborah had her apron over her face, for fear she would see that "dreadful man" who was coming to take away her darling. The silence of the house and surroundings was guarded by the master himself. The bells were muffled and the street bedded with straw, to drown the rumbling of passing vehicles. The fountains were stilled, and Pirate's noise hushed day and night. During these sorrowful days the atelier stood utterly deserted. The master had remained in the house since the first night when he entered with the doctor. Sometimes he remained in the sick-room only for an hour or two at a time, for he felt that the mute anxiety of the sleepless nurse could not endure surveillance; but gradually his stay beside the sick-bed was prolonged, and met with no protest, for Mercedes's strength was giving way, and she realized that she could find no more reliable support than this man, who watched his favorite with such loving solicitude. She no longer met him with a frown, nor started up from her kneeling position at the bedside when she heard his step. She was resigned in the face of the calamity that seemed to hang over her exausted energies, and her proud heart submitted to the inevitable.

She exchanged very few words, and yet each gained something like a juster estimate of the other's character. He had a sphinx nature to study, indeed, that frequently escaped his comprehension by turning upon him some new and puzzling feature.

What singular sensations permeated him at times, when his eyes were lifted from the sick-bed and fell upon the fairy-like surroundings that gleamed in their color radiance as if a magic shower had scattered its treasures about the beautiful woman, who had brought all this brightness from her southern

home, to make at least one of the rooms of the Ger... habitable for the luxuriantly indulged nature. From the coverlet that draped her couch, to the smallest drinking cu... that glowed with fiery-eyed ruby settings, all was indicative of the sybarite splendor of the planter's daughter's home over the sea.

She was born in such a luxuriantly refined atmosphere; but she had turned from the ease of her remotely situated and war-protected estate, and cast herself into the stormy struggle. Her pampered senses did not shrink from the thunder of battle; her tender feet braved the wilderness of danger, and the white hand clutched bravely the protecting weapon, when the downy, silken couch was exchanged for the hard earth and the soldier's blanket in the cause of those she loved.

With what fanatical vehemence she had sneered in reference to the negroes the query "human beings!"—and yet she would permit no hand but her own to smooth the pillow nor hand the cooling drink to the black Deborah. "My good, faithful servant," who had grieved herself sick with the loving anxiety during her pet's illness, and fretted like a child in taking the prescribed medicine until the patient, soothing voice of her mistress coaxed her to submission.

She exhibited a detestation of everything German, but the music-rack held Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert. The writing-desk gave evidence that she used her pen in the German language also.

Around and above this desk Donna Mercedes had described a picture of her American home. There hung the oil painting of her proud Spanish mother, in the Undine-like beauty that distinguished her daughter. The dark, waving "gypsy hair" was twined with pearls, and the magnificent form draped in queenly velvet, caught here and there with clustering precious stones. Truly, this second wife of Major Lucian was the highest type of haughtiness. The almost wrecked-in-happiness handsome man had certainly made a conquest here. His own and Felix's picture was there also, and a number of water-color paintings, and sketches of Lucian's possessions before the war. On the desk stood a beautiful bracket frame, containing a photograph of a young man, with a handsome, but rather insignificant face.

"That is poor Valmaseda," Lucille had said, in her flippant way. "He was so handsome; but the wisest thing he could have done was to die. To tell you candidly, he was not over-clever. Mercedes was engaged to him at fifteen; at that time they suited each other, but she became awfully intellectual

...nd the poor fellow could never have kept up with her ...es, and then there would have been a sad time for him. ...ckily, an enemy's ball sent him to heaven in his lover's illu...on; Mercedes was at his side and caught him in her arms, and they say his last words were: 'This is a heavenly death.'"

At this desk the medical consultation was held, but Mercedes eventually remained at the bedside, and the baron transmitted the doctor's hopes, fears, and directions to her. This sensation of weakness was new to her, and for the first time in her life she experienced the need of support, and the mocking, contemptuous expression vanished from her face, as day after day the noble, unselfish German shared her vigils, and inspired her with courage with his honestly sympathetic eyes. She became restless when he was absent, and her heart beat joyfully at his approach. She no longer thought of the praying woman in Rome, who despised the unknown guests, and insulted them by locking up all the rooms but the ones with the ghost-haunted reputation that her own bigoted superstitions had given them.

There was something unpleasant about these apartments. The windows reached the floor of the veranda, with balusters so low that any one could step over them, and, according to the doctor's orders, the windows were left wide open.

Donna Mercedes was sitting behind the lace curtains of the bed, watching her charge.

There was darkness without, but a shadow fell athwart the flags that was not made by the columns of the house. The silence was intense, nor denoted the footfall of human approach; and still the watcher saw a white, stony, female face bend over the baluster, and, with darkly glowing eyes, stare at the pillow of the sick child as if they would absorb the between-life-and-death hovering little soul. At the startled rising of the watcher, that countenance vanished as if it had been wiped out of the darkness.

Donna was not very familiar with the servants of the house, but she knew this white, anguished face belonged to none of them or she surely would have observed it before. But she spoke of it to no one—she rarely spoke during this sad time.

At last the severest night of all came; each coming, heavily drawn breath of the little sufferer dragged as if it would be the last and the heart be stilled forever. Then the morning dawned, and gave back to existence a human soul—little José was saved!

The joy was unbounded. The two colored people acted like

mad, and Lucille's delight was as extravagant as he[illegible] been.

Her toilet was carefully made again. Dressed in a light [illegible] with flowers in her long curls and upon her bosom, she cam[illegible] dancing into the sick-room, to fall upon her boy's bed, an[illegible] scatter over it the flowers she carried in her hands. But the physician peremptorily forbade it, and Lucille was wounded to the heart because they could not understand and appreciate her maternal rejoicing. She turned her back upon them, poutingly. The danger was over. She might be her own naughty, naïve self again now.

Mercedes retained her composure during the day. None beheld the tears of unutterable relief and happiness she shed. But the night had come again; Baron Schilling had gone to his studio, and Deborah was attending the tea-table in Lucille's room, where the little lady was taking supper with Pauly.

It was nine o'clock. The sky was overcast with rain-clouds, and the lightning played among them in the distance. The sick child slept the deep sleep of exhaustion. An angel of wax could not have lain among the pillows more unmoving. Mercedes knelt at the bedside with her hand on the now cool, moist little one of her precious José. She was alone with him and might feast her eyes upon the little shadowy face. It would soon fill out again with fresh youthful vigor and beauty. She buried her face in the pillow beside it and burst into a terrible passion of long pent-up tears.

The night wind swept over the rose-bushes in the garden, and carried their fragrance into the room as it gently lifted the curtains in passing through. Mercedes heard the light rustling of the silken material, but she fancied she heard the hem of a dress sweeping the flagstones of the columned hall—then a hand was laid upon the window-sill.

Mercedes sprung to her feet. The white stony face of the woman was there again. A heavy braid of white hair lay like a diadem upon her head; a black shawl that had evidently been thrown over it had fallen over her shoulders, and the hands gripped wildly at the window for support.

"Dead!" she cried, her eyes flashing over the little sleeper, with a harrowing, agonized moan.

The speechless suffering displayed in that human face caused Mercedes to act with relieving haste. She motioned an emphatic negative, and approached the window. She caught one more glance of those burning eyes, and the hand lifted in drawing the shawl over head and face. Then the figure vanished in the darkness like a phantom.

...s determined to assure herself that she was not dreaming, and rushed into the adjoining room, where there was no light, and bent far out of the window for a better view, but the darkness was impenetrable. Then she heard the clicking of an iron gate, and all was still as death. Suddenly a voice close to the window said:

"Now, I know for sure—it was a man."

"You always know better than other people," was the provoked response. The voice was Robert's, the waiter. "You had better say it was Adam's and be done with it. I say it was a woman, and no mistake; I almost caught her the other night."

"But what in the mischief does she want? that's what I'd like to know! One thing is certain, she haunts the column hall, and peeps into the windows. Still, that is not so strange after all." The man laughed contemptuously. "We do the same thing; it's as good as a theater in there. Regular blackamoors—in a room fit for the King of Morocco—a lot of fancy stuff and imitation precious stones—the 'princess' on her knees before the bed, and our master sitting by looking on as if he were studying the situation to put on canvas. It's an outrage! He sticks in that room all the time, and that madame don't seem to have a particle of decency left, to carry on so before us. It's got to be the talk of the house. No doubt she would be only too glad if the baroness never came back; Schillingscourt is not a bad place to live in. But she'll be mistaken there. My lady will drop down on them some of these pretty days; and, oh! the fun we shall see!" The man's tones were suppressed, but every word, with its horrible import, struck upon Mercedes's senses with terrific force. She returned to her room as Deborah entered, and the poor black woman trembled when she saw the face of her mistress. The eyes stocked in a face that looked as if there was not a drop of blood in her body. She wiped the lips in which the teeth had been hard set, and motioned for Deborah to seat herself at the bedside, and went out into the air. There was suffocation in this house.

She glided past the statue of Love; wantonness and roguishness smiled down upon her from the faces of Aphrodite and Eros, and the beautiful woman, with compressed lips and anger-inflated nostrils, would have made the trio perfect in the character of Hate.

The gossipers still stood near the door as she passed out, and the creature who had just scandalized her so infamously bowed low to the stately white-robed "princess."

She was about to open the garden-gate leading on to the first terrace, when she perceived the baron's form loom out of the darkness, as he came up the steps. His face was happily contented—he had been among his treasures again after so many anxious, absent days, and found among them new inspiration and food for glorious thought.

He held in his hand a bunch of buds he had evidently just gathered in the hot-house. With a pleased smile to find her out there, he extended the flower.

Without lifting a hand to accept them, Mercedes shortly said:

"Thank you. I do not like flowers," and stepped aside to let him pass.

But at this moment she heard the doctor's voice in the hall, who had come to make his customary evening visit to the patient, and she was forced to return and remain in the sick-room with the two gentlemen.

The baron placed the disdained flowers on a pedestal at the feet of an Ariadne, and conversed politely with the physician, while the latter examined the condition of the little patient, and assured them that all the symptoms were progressing satisfactorily.

"When do you think it will be safe to move him from this room?" Mercedes asked.

The doctor looked at her in surprise. He was not familiar with these brusque hard tones, and that impatient tremor from the mouth usually so silent and resigned.

"Such a thing is not to be thought of at present," he replied.

"Not if I carry him out in my arms, carefully wrapped—"

"Carry him out!" The man was literally amazed now. "My dear lady, it will be soon enough to consider such a step two weeks hence. At present any change of room or nursing might occasion a relapse."

He took his leave, and the baron, who accompanied him to the door, returned and walked rapidly to the writing-desk, where Mercedes was standing, with one white hand close to the photograph of the handsome man in the elegant oval bracket.

"José is sleeping," said she, as if to arrest his approach. She did not deign to look at him in speaking, but continued to look at the framed face before her. She knew he was standing with the full light of the globe lamp shining upon their faces, and that his eyes sought hers, as he asked:

"What is the matter?"

She confessed that the sudden change in her manner justified the question; but she was not in the habit of accounting for

her actions—no one ventured to call them to account heretofore.

"I do not understand you, sir!" she replied, contrasting the feminine features of the photograph with the strong, stern face of the man who presumed to address her so authoritatively. She made a lovely picture of a Spanish girl, with the lace thrown over the dark, abundant hair, and the iron visor would have suited well to that square forehead. "I do not understand you." The evasive answer and comparing glance did not escape the comprehensive questioner, and the blood mounted to his face as he coldly queried:

"Am I to believe that you would be capable of endangering the life of the child we both idolize without a reason of more than ordinary weight? You would carry him out in your arms? Where would you take him?"

What a rude questioner! No courteous diplomacy of getting at the subject. A regular unpolished German attack, leaving no loophole of escaping the direct question. But how could she acknowledge that she had listened, however unintentionally, to the gossiping tongues of his servants? To be sure she would have found it possible, while standing out there in the hall awhile ago, to say to him: "I wish never to see you again. You are to blame for the slanders that have humbled me. You forced yourself into the sick-room, and thereby subjected me to low-bred suspicions. You prevented me from leaving the house its mistress had insultingly deserted." But now, with those clear, honest eyes upon her, she had not the courage to heap reproach and ingratitude upon the man who had so nobly, unselfishly proved her faithful friend during sickness and unutterable sorrow.

"Why waste words about reasons that must necessarily give way to the doctor's orders?" she replied, without looking at him.

He smiled ironically. "Yes, his orders are that no change must be made in the nursing or the room."

"I will speak to the doctor about that myself," she quickly interpolated. "Or rather we, the nurses, must make some other arrangements. During those awful days of anxiety I was selfish enough to accept your watchful care. This must no longer be. You have sacrificed your time—"

"Ah! It is caprice on your part, as I thought," was the sudden interruption.

She started. He had touched a tender spot in her heart, where regret was slumbering. Yes, in the old, indolent days, when she was still rocked in the waves of girlish ease and sun-

light, she had been a capricious, thoughtless being. They were all dead that gazed at her from those frames, and they may have suffered from the humors of the only daughter, that was so tenderly indulged in all her wayward moods.

"The danger is over," he continued, in a subdued tone, "and the evil spirits are asserting themselves again. You wish to wound me, and act as you may have been in the habit of doing with the poor creatures that may have come in contact with you; but you forget that you have here a practical German to deal with, who knows nothing about such airy things as 'caprice,' and seeks for solid reasons, and thus once more I ask, why am I to be banished?"

It was plain to be seen that he had not the remotest idea of the actual cause of her changed manner, and attributed it entirely to a whim. This pained her, but the pride that had hardened her so far would not permit a justification. The boundless haughtiness that characterized the picture of the lady in the velvet and the pearls, hanging over the desk, was reflected from the face before him as she replied:

"I have already said I can no longer permit you to sacrifice your time—"

"And I might justly remind you that José's charge is a mutual one. Felix placed him in my care as well as that of his sister, and where it is a matter of duty there can be no question of sacrifice. We are both simply fulfilling a promise"—he had retreated toward the sick-bed while speaking—"and, so far, I have considered the place here neutral ground, where there was but one thought—the welfare of the child—as, if I entertained the least fear that my absence would retard the speedy recovery of José, I should not move an inch at your bidding; but I leave him in good hands, and go."

"You go in anger." The speaker was pale as marble, but her voice was emotionless, and she made no attempt to stay him.

"Yes, I am vexed, but with myself, for blissful confidence that resulted in my present humiliation. I have heard you speak hardly of me, and you have ruthlessly judged me without a glance into the real circumstance."

She turned away, and moved the articles on the desk in an objectless manner.

"Your annihilating observation about the negro race, some time ago, was most revolting to me, but I forgot it when I saw the self-sacrificing nobility with which you endured the injustice of Lucille immediately after, and the tenderness you exhibited for her children. You are ruled by two powers—a

God-given, grand woman's soul, and the consequence of a prejudiced education. The latter, combined with a caprice of the hour, makes me also a sufferer for the moment, but it can not happen a second time. I am not given to slavish submission."

He bent over the sleeping boy for a moment, and laid his slender hand upon his clinging curls; then he passed out of the room.

Mercedes listened with bloodless face to his receding footsteps, as if she would catch their faintest sound, for they would hear them in these rooms no more. The woman, accustomed to nothing but flattering phrases, had just been subjected to most unkind words; but was it not her own fault? Had she made an attempt to disguise her angry feelings? Had she ever considered it worth her while to act other than her absolute self for the sake of any gentleman? The proudest nabob in South Carolina, the handsome man looking at her from that oval face, had been nothing less than her submissive slave.

With heaving bosom and burning heart, she knelt at José's bedside and buried her face in the cool linen.

CHAPTER XX.

José's convalescence progressed very slowly. The little fellow was so fearfully reduced and weak that it was deemed necessary still to guard against startling noises, and the street was laid anew with straw, although some days had passed since he was pronounced out of danger. Mercedes and the baron had not met since their unpleasant parting, and Hanna had taken his place as nurse at the invalid's couch without protest from Mercedes. The girl, with her serious face and quiet ways, made an excellent nurse; and her countenance lost its intense gloom as soon as she was permitted to cross the threshold of the "big room," to stay there night and day. José became attached to her; and Donna Mercedes soon accustomed herself to this girl, who never spoke unless spoken to, and never stared at her as if she were an object of curiosity. Entirely devoted to her duty, she seemed never to require rest, refreshment, or recreation; but appeared oversensitive to the least rustling or noise in the room. Sometimes she halted suddenly in crossing the floor, and, with distended eyes and listening attitude, concentrated every nerve upon the carved wall, where the sofa stood with its green silken cushion.

Lucille, who caught her in this peculiarly alert position once, declared the girl was crazy, and took pains to avoid her. In

fact, the little lady visited the "haunted room" very rarely now. It provoked her because there was "such a fuss" still made over the boy who had no longer a pain or ache. She detested this "whispering and tiptoeing," and when she gave the "poor" starved child a few bonbons on the sly, they scolded her as if she had tried to poison him.

She knew nothing of the little "difference" between Mercedes and their host, and considered it perfectly natural that he should confine himself to his studio, and "make up for lost time."

"He stands before his easel as if he had grown there, and gives me anything but an inviting look if I happen to peep in upon him," she grumbled.

To all appearance the voluble little lady had found something to "amuse" her in her own rooms, and probably continued her "stage" practicing. Little Pauly said "mamma had wings like the angels in the picture-books," and "didn't have on any stockings," and wore dresses "all gold and silver."

About this time great trunks full of things were sent away —"old-fashioned stuff" that the Berlin dress-maker was going to remodel "fit to wear."

Accompanied by her maid, Lucille went on "little shopping expeditions" that resulted in great and numerous packages sent after her to Schillingscourt. She made the most expensive purchases, with the nonchalance of one having millions at command.

One afternoon she stormed, somewhat confused, into Mercedes's apartments, after returning from one of these "little expeditions," her eyes glowing excitedly through the pale, thin veil she wore.

"My cash is all gone," she exclaimed, "and I require five hundred dollars to pay a few little debts I've contracted!"

She extended her neatly gloved little hand to Mercedes, in anticipation of having her request complied with at once.

"Why, you have just received a like sum," Mercedes remarked, a trifle disturbed, and would have added something more, but Lucille would not let her finish.

"Oh, pray don't take me to task for such a dab!—five hundred dollars! My mamma used to spend more than that on porters and hotel servants when she went abroad. To be sure, to such paupers as we are that is wealth. Bah! why don't you call me to account for the bread I eat, Madame Mercedes? This looks like the brilliant life I was promised when I was induced to go to America. I'll wager my head"—she ran her finger across her throat with the words—"that you pre-

sume upon your authority in acting so contemptibly mean with me about money matters, and I am not going to tolerate it any longer."

She came to an abrupt pause; the money was on the desk before her. Without another word Mercedes pointed to the bank-notes.

Lucille slipped them into her pocket. "I am going to take Pauly out; she needs a new hat."

"The child is asleep in the nursery, tired out with romping."

"I shall wake her."

The little mother ran toward the nursery as if she had not a moment to spare; but Mercedes reached the door before her, saying, impatiently:

"Nonsense, Lucille! to frighten the child out of a refreshing sleep for such a whim!"

The little lady pushed by the speaker and opened the door. Deborah sat beside the crib of the sleeping child, who was undressed, with the exception of a thin slip.

"What stupidity!" the mother angrily exclaimed, "to undress a child just for an afternoon nap. Pauly, Pauly! wake up, baby!"

The little tired eyelids raised and fell again in complete fatigue, and Deborah stood before her charge pleading to have her "get her nap out."

"I don't know what to think of you, Lucille," Mercedes remarked, looking in alarm at her excited sister-in-law.

"Think what you please!" the lady snapped. "I hope I am at liberty to take my child out if I feel disposed to do so! Deborah, dress Pauly immediately. The little sleepy-head will be awake by that time."

"The child shall not be disturbed," Mercedes said, with cold decision.

"What is the matter with Pauly, auntie?" the sick boy cried from the adjoining room, his voice trembling with weakness and anxiety.

Mercedes caught her breath in alarm, and changed her voice to coaxing tones with Lucille.

"Be sensible—do. Let the little one rest and take her later."

"I won't do it!" The pretty face under the veil grew quite red, as if the little lady were struggling with a flood of tears.

At this moment Minna entered the room, dressed for the street, and looking at her mistress impressively and respectfully, said:

"It is getting late; if my lady wishes to attend to that business to-day—"

Lucille did not wait for her to finish the sentence. Turning upon Mercedes as if she contemplated scratching that lady's eyes out, she hissed rather than spoke:

"You have always been my evil genius, you yellow gypsy, you! You have interfered with me, and robbed me of my triumphs wherever you could! Presuming upon your cotton-bale wealth, you have crowded yourself to notice. You stuck-up Americans don't know anything about personal charm and beauty, and you probably thought the 'little Dutch girl' would play the servant; failing in that, you have made yourself my 'trainer.' But it is my turn now, Donna de Valmaseda! I'll show you what Lucille Fournier is in Germany, and how they value me—where I have but to move, and young and old glow with enthusiasm for me! Heavens! when I realize this, I wonder how I endured your dull kind of existence for eight long years."

She took the parasol she had thrown on a chair on entering the nursery, and sailed out of the room, trailing the rustling silk behind her at great length. Approaching the sick-bed, she passed her hand caressingly over José's face, saying, jestingly:

"Hurry and get out of this cage, dearie; you are as well as a fish again, and ought to have been out playing with Pirate this long while. Be a little man! don't let them feed you like a baby any longer. Good-bye, sweet."

A few minutes later she entered a passing cab that her maid had hailed, and the two were driven to town, to make more purchases, probably.

Donna Mercedes looked after the vehicle with a frown. Would that the pretty inmate would take a notion to—stay away!

Mercedes started guiltily as the involuntary thought flashed through her mind. She saw the reproachful face of her brother, with his dying appeal to her for his treasure, and the sacred promise she had given him, and with which she had made his last days peaceful. Oh! wonderful thing is this woman's heart! Strong and all enduring in great suffering, and bearing the thrusts of destiny without a murmur, but feeling itself wounded and almost conquered by the needle-pricks of a wicked tongue.

Ashamed of her momentary resentment, Mercedes seated herself at José's side and endeavored to restore the little fellow's composure. His bustling little mamma's visit had excited him so that his pulse began to beat feverishly, and his

nerves quivered at the least noise. By the time this excitement had abated night had come, and Deborah asked whether Pauly might take her supper with Aunt Mercedes, as her mamma had not yet returned.

Mercedes glanced anxiously at the clock. The little lady had never remained away this late before. A feeling of inexplicable fear began to possess her—that mysterious apprehension begotten of a dread lest our guilty wishes should suddenly be realized, to our own sorrow and regret.

She stepped to the window, and was somewhat quieted by the activity on the street. People were promenading, carriages rolled by, and all was life abroad. 'Twas absurd to be alarmed about the little lady, who had probably forgotten the passage of time while sitting in some restaurant nibbling at dainties.

The supper-table was still waiting. Pauly had been given her bread and milk and put to bed. Mercedes paced the floor in restless anxiety, occasionally pausing at José's bedside to watch the little fellow, who seemed to have imbibed something of her own inquietude. At last Jack returned from a fruitless search along the streets, where he had recently accompanied Lucille on one or two occasions. He had inquired in the stores and restaurants she visited, but the pretty little American from Schillingscourt had not been seen that day.

Thus ten o'clock struck its somber toll from the Benedictine steeple in the vicinity, and Mercedes, no longer able to contain herself, went to Lucille's apartments, feeling as if the little bustling lady must be there.

The place was in disorder, as usual. The floor was covered with articles of wearing apparel. Before the large dressing-mirror lay scattered the evidences of a hasty toilet. The wee slippers lay as the wanton little feet had kicked them off; a dressing-jacket was flung in another direction; gloves, impatiently cast aside at the first trial, kept company with disdained laces and ribbon; the dainty powder-puff had followed the slippers after its last service in beautifying its pretty owner.

The searching lady paused on her rounds, the floor seemed to float from beneath her feet; with trembling hand she reached for the white envelope her eye had espied on the dressing-table, addressed to herself. With tottering form she sunk into a chair. She knew what had happened—blind that she had been not to perceive Lucille's intentions in the afternoon—that she was going away—to stay.

"José is well again," the little lady wrote, in her airy fashion; "and I claim a leave of absence—that is, I take it,

for I should never receive it from you. Thank God that my boy has begun to mend seriously, for a few days more of waiting and I should have gone mad! Did you really suppose that I could endure German air without returning to the scenes of my triumphs, and where I am received again with open arms and shouts of joy? At last! at last! Every day spent in this abominably tedious place is a deprivation to me, and robs me of so much of my glorious youth that, alas! has been sadly sacrificed as it is. I am off for Berlin, for an indefinite time. I take Pauly with me. The child shall have a glimpse of the world from which her mother sprung—there alone is life—all outside of this stage existence is a bare and perpetual sameness—"

Mercedes threw the letter aside without reading the last lines. Notwithstanding her indignation and the tears that welled to her eyes, she rejoiced to think Pauly was not with the thoughtless mother. She comprehended her anger now when the "little sleepy-head" would not respond to the lady's hasty call to "wake up!"

What a mean trick! What perfidy! What an egotistical creature it is! Not out of mourning for her husband—a child scarcely escaped from the grave—she had, indeed, proved that she loved the boy while he was so ill, and she had loved her husband, also, and promised him, on his death-bed, that she would not forsake Mercedes and her children—and still she had thrown off the fetters, in her insane desire to be admired and to enjoy life according to her ideas of living, and flown like the bird that flies blindly, because it must use its wings.

Mercedes took the letter and placed it in her pocket. A flood of crimson suddenly mantled her face. How unfortunate—how painfully unpleasant! the thought entered her mind. Lucille's absence made her, alone, Baron Schilling's guest.

She hastened back to her own rooms.

"My sister-in-law has gone to Berlin for a few days," she coldly explained to Hanna and the two colored servants.

Deborah's eyes rolled with a fright-inspired glance toward Pauly's little bed—pretty nearly that sly mamma had carried off her darling—but she ventured no word of questioning. The faithful servants comprehended that they were to forget the hours of solicitude for the absent lady, and simply know that "she had gone to Berlin."

Mercedes trusted that the lady's unadvised absence would not be remarked, but, to her dismay, the very second day after her departure bills began to pour in, with marginal

notices to the effect that the "American lady had probably forgotten to settle the little matter."

Robert, who generally received the bills at the door, was doubtless the busybody who had spread the report of Lucille's unexpected departure. He would knock at Mercedes's door timidly, and deliver the ominous document on a silver salver with a conscious importance, and accept his dismissal in a short "That will do," and return to the waiting collector, smiling with malicious blandness, and show his empty hands, saying:

"If people will trust every strange female who happens along, they must expect to grow wise by experience. We can't be responsible for people who intrude upon Schillingscourt hospitality!"

Lucille had taken advantage of her position as Baron Schilling's guest; and the purchases she had made amounted to no mean sum. Mercedes readily judged what the little lady contemplated doing with so extensive a wardrobe obtained on this credit, and Jack was sent immediately to settle all demands.

The two faithful negroes watched their mistress with deepest interest, but never uttered sympathy during these days. They had studied that face from the cradle; they had never known her to weaken or despond. Without a change of feature she had looked at the wound-dressing of her arm; had smiled scornfully when her house had been invaded in search of hidden rebels; nor lost her dignified bearing when the flames were devouring the home of her childhood, with its precious contents and holy associations. She had offered them their freedom, but they would not accept it, feeling that with such a brave and noble mistress they would be taken care of for life. But in this land of strangers they fancied the beloved lady was losing some of her firmness. There were times when her eyes would flash with anger, and the haughty lip curve with an emotion impossible to suppress, and she paced the floor oftentimes like some caged being, helpless to escape from the invisible bars. She realized for the first time in her life what it was to be attacked with calumny—unprotected by the friends of a lifetime and the sacredness of a long-established character. Like a serpent, the circumstances of her position wound themselves about her—she felt the poison-fangs only after they had entered her soul. Lucille had left her alone, to create a sensation among her former friends in Berlin; but how long would she be gone? Oh! how fervently she prayed that the little selfish mortal would return before the baroness came home and found her, alone, the guest of the baron; and

she also feared that Lucille's imprudence might accelerate the consumptive tendencies of her constitution.

Four days of restless waiting and anxiety passed, and still the pleasure-seeking lady had not returned. Every time a carriage passed the door Mercedes hoped the next would bring her. Every time the door opened she started with nervous expectation, only to be disappointed. The fifth day at last brought some signs of life from the absent—only a thin letter, to be sure, but Mercedes tore the envelope open with trembling fingers, and after one glance over the first lines her heart sunk hopelessly:

"I am in heaven, and all Berlin is enchanted! What were mamma's triumphs to the victory I have achieved! I am literally buried in flowers, and my parlors are so crowded with enthusiastic visitors that I was forced to seek a retreat for the purpose of dashing off these few lines. Yes, I live again! It is a glorious existence, there is none other to compare with it! The preparations made in secret, and that for which I have worked ever since my feet have touched German ground again, has succeeded. And since your meddling can be of no avail any more, you may as well know the truth—I made my *début* last night as Gesilla."

Great God! the consumptive woman dancing on the stage, and receiving the applause of the multitude, when every step she took was like whirling into the arms of death. This explained the little lady's "amusement," and now these extensive dry-goods bills were accounted for, and the hasty departure for Berlin. Blind Mercedes! How unpardonably "naïve and innocent" was that sister-in-law, and what a negligent guardian she had proved herself toward the charge intrusted to her by Felix, who must have feared just such a step on Lucille's part—and she had cheated them all—the bird had flown and was floating in an atmosphere that might be her death at any moment.

Mercedes rose hastily; there was no choice, she must go to Berlin. Once more composed and energetic, she made preparations for an immediate trip. She must, however, inform her host of the intention, and place the children in his care during her absence.

Her face became red—she was in a painful dilemma. How could she see him and explain matters, after their unpleasant parting. To write would scarcely answer—to ask him into her room after his curt dismissal, she had not the courage—he would certainly be justified in refusing to come.

A brief struggle with her pride, then she took Lucille's letter and went to the studio.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. The hot outdoor air was prostrating, as if it was wafted upon her from the glass panes of the conservatory. How she did long that the gentleman might observe her approach and gallantly come to the rescue; but not a studio door opened, although Pirate, who lay sprawling indolently upon its step, bounded up to meet her with joyous barking.

She opened the greenhouse door. The first sight that met her eyes was a cluster of the very blossoms she had so discourteously rejected on their last meeting. Her heart beat to suffocation, and her face flushed with shame; these blossoms nodded gently to what she deemed her humiliation.

She turned away her head and walked firmly and with intentional bustle toward the studio entrance—she wished the baron to become aware of her presence—but the spluttering fountain waters drowned the noise of her approach.

The green curtain drooped over the door-way, but left a free space through which she saw the artist at work before his easel, brush in hand. He was absorbed in critical examination of his object, and Mercedes was reluctant to disturb the perfect silence of nature by a word. But at this moment Robert appeared from behind the Gobelin curtain on the gallery and came down the winding stairway, carrying a valise and traveling duster. He turned his face in an opposite direction, as if he made it a point not to see the lady entering the studio.

She stood, with the curtain lifted in her hand, upon the threshold, and spoke in a voice at which she was startled herself, it was so hoarse and brusque.

"Baron Schilling, will you be good enough to give me your attention a moment?"

He started, and his face crimsoned. She observed that her presence affected him unpleasantly. His eyes gleamed coldly blue, and a sarcastic smile accompanied his movements, as he laid aside his brush and politely motioned for her to enter and be seated, saying:

"Ah! a visitor from—caprice!"

She bit her lip, then looked expressively at the man who pretended to be engaged with the baggage while lingering near enough to overhear their conversation. The baron bade him be gone.

Donna Mercedes extended Lucille's letter, as if desirous of making the interview as short as possible.

"Is the letter from Mrs. Lucian?"

"Yes, from Berlin."

"I know about what it contains," said he, declining to read it. "I have also received a letter from her. She has made a most successful *début*."

Mercedes smiled sadly. "A great honor for our name—and I am to blame that it is printed upon a play-bill."

"If that is the damage it will suffer you need not fear it will be dishonored by being associated with genius. I am also condemned by many of my friends because I earn honest bread thereby, and labor, rather than play the gentleman as the administrator of my wife's estate."

She felt herself hit. Her scornful "Yes, with his wife's money!" was set aside with one blow.

"I really do not see how you are accountable for the rash step your sister-in-law has taken."

"I trusted her to a ridiculous extent."

"I did not imagine a trusting nature lay beneath those eyes, dear lady."

Her face glowed like a flame at these politely uttered words. How she must have wounded and offended him to produce such resentment!

"I am fully conscious of the misfortune that would not let me look at life with the gentle gray or mild blue German eyes; but I will strive to bear with the evil. I am not, you see, vain enough to contest for a place among the Holbein Madonnas. I have some idea of German patriotism. That which will not fit the feminine type, the German artist coolly wipes out—like yon eyes."

She pointed to the canvas with the dark streak of paint across the face, where the unsatisfactory eyes had been.

In cleaning the place, the canvas had evidently come to the surface again without the knowledge of the artist, for he followed the direction of her hand with surprise, and a dark frown gathered upon his face.

Mercedes laughed softly, and the baron started at the sound. That serious mouth was not given to showing its pearly teeth in merriment—even now there was decided mockery in the curve of the lips.

"Possibly the artist created those eyes under that line of paint without his own volition," she remarked, sarcastically, "but it was rage that dashed them out—or caprice!"

Without a word more on the subject it was ended by the baron, who took up a knife and cut the picture from its frame, rolled it together, and locked it in a drawer.

There was a rustling of garments. Mercedes had retreated

to the door. She no longer smiled, her face was like marble against the dark curtain she lifted, then turned a moment, saying, quietly:

"I am about to leave Schillingscourt, and am forced to ask your supervision and guardianship for the children during my absence."

"You are going to Berlin?"

"I am—to get Lucille; she must come back."

"I am of the same opinion; but can you catch the lark that is already soaring in the air?"

"Her jubilation will vanish when she is made to understand that this air is surely death. I shall take with me the most celebrated physicians I can find to convince her."

"You hope to inspire her with fear of death?—you, who scorn such an emotion?"

"Oh, pray—no comparisons!" she exclaimed, haughtily; "I can not bear to be compared with Lucille. I was a thirteen-year-old child when she came among us, and I cried then bitterly; she was a blot in our house, with her uncultured ideas and flippant conduct—my house with its refined atmosphere, created by my proud grandpapa and my mother—"

She pressed her hands excitedly upon her breast, as if striving to quiet the tumultuous emotions there. "My God! How I despise the being that can forget so soon! Felix would have sacrificed every drop of his life blood for her—and she—she is dancing over his new made grave!"

"And you are anxious to resume this despicable burden," he asked, looking her squarely in the eyes, "and drag your young life down with such a responsibility?

"Is it not my duty? Can I break my promise? Felix is dead, but the pledge I gave him I considered as sacred as the pledge given at the altar that unites man and wife, and may not be taken back, though it became a chain that pressed us to the earth in spiritual death."

She paused, as if a secret had escaped her, and began to reach for the door drapery in a confused way. The baron replaced the knife he had used in cutting the canvas on the table, and quietly rejoined:

"That sounds Spartan-like, and its results would be decidedly contrary to true morality. There is danger in the obstinate carrying out of a code—it may lead a person into a system of extreme that leads into the enemy's stronghold—a bad place even for brave people to retreat from."

She compressed her lips, and her haughty head bowed slowly upon her breast.

The baron came back to plain facts then, and added:

"You will not accomplish anything in Berlin. What do you expect to do in the event of Mrs. Lucian's absolute withdrawal from your protection?"

"I will still cling to her, and follow her footsteps—"

"Even into the green-room?"

Mercedes involuntarily stepped back a pace.

"Ah, that you could not do. I knew it. With all your courage and energy, you would flutter about the place like a storm-tossed bird, and fly from strange glances and curiously inquisitive eyes, without having performed your mission. Permit me to attend to it; I had already decided upon going as soon as I received Lucille's letter, and am prepared for the trip." He pointed to his valise. "I know I shall not accomplish anything, however. From the tone of her letter, I judge she would prefer death on the stage, in the face of an applauding multitude, to returning to your protection. She says you may keep José, but demands Pauly emphatically."

"She can not have her. Never!"

"Then let me go to Berlin. It will require more than a physician's advice to bring the little lady to reason. We shall have to resort to the authority of the law."

"So be it then. And—I thank you."

How warm and womanly the three little words were uttered. How unlike the rude manner with which his floral offering was rejected, some time since, in the excitement of her humiliation.

He did not seem to be conscious of the difference, nor appear to see the hand extended with the expression of thanks. Looking at his watch, he hastily rang the bell; summoning a servant to take his valise, he strapped a small traveling satchel across his shoulders and reached for his hat.

Mercedes stepped into the conservatory, and, in passing by some blooming plants, her dress brushed hard against an overhanging flower, tearing it from its stem.

It fell at her feet, and, with a cry of regret, she was about to pick it up, but the baron anticipated the act.

"Never mind," said he, coldly; "a little floral nature like that is not as sensitive as the human heart; it can enjoy its existence though suddenly transferred to a colder element."

He laid the blossom upon the edge of the marble basin, with the stem touching the water.

Mercedes passed out of the green-house and stood without, waiting for him. Looking down at the gravel she was apparently interested in lifting with the toe of her boot, she asked, timidly:

"When may we look for your return?"

"In about three days."

"That will seem like an age to José. He is asking for you continually. Will you not step in and see the little fellow before going?"

"No—no!"

She looked up now. His countenance was honestly expressive of his emotions. He met her glance with an indignant one.

"I have conquered my longing to see him. We shall celebrate our next meeting out here, under the trees."

He lifted his hat courteously and departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

PALE and troubled, Mercedes returned to her apartments. She unpacked with her own hands, as she had packed them, the necessary articles required for the journey she had contemplated. José sat among his pillows, playing feebly with a toy horse. His auntie remained with him for some time, then feeling the painful tumult raging in her bosom growing more stormy, she retreated to the window, where, free from his affectionately observing eyes, she could be at liberty to think.

Pauly came toddling into the room with her doll, and looked up at her with those large questioning eyes—those "bright scintillant stars" that had lured Felix from life to an early death—Lucille's laughing eyes.

The child's gaze was still innocent and sweet as a seraph's, beneath that wondrous golden hair. Should she follow the footsteps of that frivolous mother unto the labyrinthian maze of a stage existence? No! no! Mercedes lifted the little one to her heart and embraced her with passionate tenderness. Oh, how often Felix had held his "little comfort" thus, and buried his suffering face in the soft curls during those last anguished days of his life!

"Mercedes, take care of my babes!" he had moaned. "Oh, God! could I rest under the sod if they should go astray?"

With his last expiring strength he had written a letter, fraught with pleading, to his mother, and made such disposition of his dear ones as he felt assured would be for their welfare. These papers and letters were in that silver-bound casket; it was against these last wishes that the reckless wife and mother had protested, and was now following the bent of her own inclination, regardless of all.

But these papers were authority for Mercedes's acts; she would read them again and gather new courage for her mis-

sion. She reached down for the box, where she had placed it on a lower shelf of her escritoire.

The casket was gone.

She sprung up in alarm. Her first thought was "Lucille, has taken it." The little lady was well aware that the contents gave Mercedes legal power to act for her brother. Without these documents Mercedes was helpless, and the foolish mother might do with her children as she pleased.

With frantic haste, Mercedes searched every possible spot where the casket might have been stored, but without avail. She called Deborah, who declared that she had not seen it since the morning after José was taken ill; she was confident, for she had dusted the place where it had stood regularly every morning. She had intended mentioning the fact, but as her mistress frequently locked things up inside the desk, she thought likely the casket had been put away in this manner—afterward she had forgotten all about it in the troubled days following, when José lay at the point of death.

If this was the case, Lucille had not taken the papers, and the search began anew, Deborah, Mamselle Birkner and Hanna joining in. But all in vain.

Mamselle Birkner asked if the casket was of great value.

"I guess yes," Deborah retorted; "it is bound in silver as thick as your finger!"

"It contained important papers that can not be replaced," Mercedes explained.

"The mice have carried them off," said Hanna, softly, with a stare at the wall above the green-cushioned sofa. "The mice in Schillingscourt know all about the secrets of the people here."

Deborah's eyes began to roll, and Mamselle Birkner made gesticulations behind the girl's back, implying there was something like a disordered idea about the speaker; and then began to lament because their guests should suffer a loss in the dear master's house. Then she spread the calamity in the servant's hall, where the indignation was boundless, and not by any means sympathetic.

"Well, things are coming to a pretty pass!" Robert exclaimed. "We are now accused of robbing these paupers. Fine—very fine. But I shall inform you now that I have been correct in my estimation of these people all along; they are theater people!—do you understand—play-actors—trash. Didn't I tell you that all those glittering stones were imitation and stage finery? And those two blackamoors! Gad! how I should like to get them into a bath-tub, with a scrubbing

brush! I'll bet you we'd have a pair of the whitest scoundrel-faces come to the surface that Germany ever saw. They have got to get out of this—the whole lot, bag and baggage. It's a disgrace to harbor them any longer at Schillingscourt!"

There was a grand kitchen acclamation, and Mamselle Birkner went helplessly out of the room. She knew who their guests were, but she was pledged to silence.

In the meantime Mercedes continued to search high and low in every room; she had handled the casket for the last time the day previous to José's adventure and sickness, when she had laid the papers before Baron Schilling, together with the letter to Felix's mother. This was sealed, but she was familiar with the contents, and had repeated it almost word for word to the baron. She recollected that he had admired the elegant workmanship of the box, and assisted in refolding and replacing the papers—had watched her set the casket on the shelf. The afternoon was particularly impressed upon her mind. She remembered how Lucille had fled from the room in broad daylight, saying the mice-haunted wall was too much for her. Oh, those "mice!" What an importance they assumed in the minds of some of the Schillingscourt people!

"Have you ever seen a mouse run across the floor here?" inquired Mercedes of Hanna.

"I only hear them gnawing; I see little volumes of dust rising from that wall."

The girl stood in a listening attitude, her face glowing with excitement, pointing to the "haunted" panel, with its lace-like carving, and looking indeed like the "Crazy Jane" Lucille called her.

"That may result from any concussion that shakes the house; the wood is very old. Be good enough, however, to have some mouse-trap set here at once."

The excited red vanished from the girl's cheeks at Mercedes's practical remarks, and she left the room to do her bidding, a little crest-fallen in manner.

After the sun had gone down Mercedes left the house to give vent to her suppressed feelings in the garden, in God's free air. She was unutterably oppressed and anxious. At home she could have mounted her faithful horse, and given him the lines to bear her into the woods and over plains, away, away from care, until her heart expanded and life loomed up less burdensome! But this she could not do here—but the garden air was cool and fragrant. She walked toward the greenhouse. The gardener had opened the windows and doors to permit the plants to absorb the evening dew; the fountain

spray sung dreamily, and the exotics, with their rich foliage, caressed the water's edge. The flower she had broken off with her sweeping garments still lay where the baron had placed it on the border of the basin, gently rocked by the moving waters, and looking as fresh and color-bright as its companions bedded in the warm earth.

The baron was right; the little blossom was not as sensitive as the human heart that had been changed by one chilling touch.

"This bearish German!" thought Mercedes. There was not a particle of gallantry in his nature. How unlike those chivalrous gentlemen that thronged her father's parlor—she might have struck him with her riding-whip, and the chastising hand would have been caressed for the blow. To be sure, this tame submissiveness disgusted the spirited young lady, and there were times, after her engagement, when she had tormented "poor Valmaseda" outrageously in her endeavor to make him assert himself. But there was a vast difference between the challenged retort polite, and a regular humiliation such as this man had subjected her to. Had she not conquered herself and made a decided advance toward peace—and had he not repelled her, and uncivilly ignored the attempt? That hateful head. It was ugly, with its square forehead, prominent nose, and firm mouth. She noticed it the first time she saw him, and it had inspired her with an inexplicable fear at once as if some overwhelming trouble faced her that she could not escape, and ever since she had felt as if she must be on the defensive. It was this that had made Germany hateful to her, and made her doubt the possibility of accomplishing her mission.

How deathly still it was in the adjoining atelier. Mercedes looked through the glass partition and saw the twilight shadows fall upon the unique arrangements of the interior, the odd bric-à-brac, the gallery with its tapestry and winding stairway. It seemed to her as if some antiquely dressed gentlewoman ought to come out from the mysterious shadows and glide down the steps, bearing on a silver salver one of the old-fashioned goblets filled with nectar for the artist. The self-willed mistress of Schillingscourt was not likely to do such a thing. She despised her husband's "occupation." Mercedes knew it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SILENCE reigned everywhere as Mercedes left the conservatory, the breeze was not strong enough to rustle loudly among the trees and shrub. But the splattering, as if some one were throwing stones into the waters of the lake, fell upon her ears as she neared this point in her rambling. She paused close by a rose-bush that hid her from view, for the purpose of observing from whence the sounds came.

A boy with long thin legs prowled around the lake, seeming perfectly familiar with the situation, although Mercedes had never seen him before. He threw stone after stone into the water and danced about, laughing to himself meanwhile like some crane-legged imp.

This must be that bad, tricky boy, who had induced José to follow him into the Cloister House, thought Mercedes—the heir to millions, the last bearer of the Wolfram name, for whose sake the orphans were to be robbed of their rightful inheritance by their grandmother. A holy wrath rose in Mercedes's bosom. This gyrating, ugly little imp was to blame for the recent sufferings of her pretty, gentle-hearted José, who had barely escaped the jaws of death.

She approached noiselessly a few steps nearer to get a better view of him. She did not want to scare him away. But she had forgotten that her dark dress had been exchanged for a white morning-dress, and she did not know that the sight and hearing of this bad boy was keen as a lynx.

He turned his head quickly in her direction, and the instant the white figure caught his eye he dropped the stone he was in the act of flinging and ran toward the hedge, ducked to the earth, and disappeared as if he had been swallowed up.

Mercedes walked to the spot where he had vanished. There was still a crackling and rustling of shrubs. Here was the place poor innocent José had also crept through, and walked upon the ground where his father had played in childhood, and entered the dark, strange house of his grandmother, that hard-hearted grandmother for whose sake the orphans had come across that great expanse of water.

Mercedes rarely wandered as far as the lake, and since the day she stood watching, with horror-expanded eyes, as the men were dragging the waters for the body of her darling,

dreading lest the blonde head should rise to the surface of the dark pool, she had not been near this spot.

A creaking sound broke the silence. A door opened and closed on the other side of the hedge; then footsteps came directly toward that part of the hedge where Mercedes stood, and caused her to retreat a few steps, as if the figure would walk through the seemingly impenetrable thicket upon her, and she turned away to go back to the house through the sycamore avenue, but had gone only a short distance when she turned her head, as if attracted by some irresistible magnetism, and remained standing—to meet two glowing eyes, that seemed to devour her with eager questioning, that rose above the hedge.

She had seen that head with its hair diadem before. The waxen-white face and the sharply curved thin lips were the same that had wailed at the window of her room one night the heart-rending word, "Dead!"

Mercedes's pulses stopped with surprise. She knew now who that night-walker was. It was the inexorable woman who had cast husband and son from her, and made them exiles from home and fatherland. She was still fine-looking, this statuesque being—the predecessor of the beautiful Spanish lady—Major Luican's first wife. The two whose fate she had so ruthlessly took into her own hands were dead; the strongly built and well-constituted figure there had survived them—she lived—and suffered. Nemesis had overtaken her. Who could tell how long it gnawed at the woman's consciousness? There were signs of a softening heart—a blonde-headed boy, with his father's face, was constantly before her mental vision. The grandmother's affection was stronger than the mother's anger—it grew and throve in her weakening heart as the young tree forces its way out of the hard, dark earth to the light.

Mercedes approached the woman, who was evidently standing on a bench, for the hedge could not be overlooked in this way from the ground; both arms were extended in parting the branches, and thus she stood motionless.

Thus she may have stood daily since José's illness, looking about for some of the servants who might inform her of the condition of the little fellow who had met with such abuse from the trickery of the Cloister estate heir.

Mercedes was near enough to her now to see every feature, notwithstanding the falling night, and she was able to read something of the nature in that face, and she began to understand the power before which father and son had to yield—and retreat.

"I would like to hear how the boy—"

"You mean José Lucian," Mercedes interrupted, quietly, but her heart beat with such rapidity and force she thought the woman must certainly hear it. But with a cry she started back, and the branches closed between them for an instant, then they parted again, and the waxen face appeared, but with a threatening frown and ferocious expression.

"Did I ask for any names? I simply wanted to know whether the boy—will live. My son's little son," she was adding, when a shrill voice interrupted her, and she turned with a silenced, startled look.

Mercedes saw a serpentine figure creep along a branch of the tree on the other side of the hedge, and then glide down the trunk to the ground, with the agility of a cat. She heard a pair of sharp heels scamper toward the house, and a croaking child-voice scream:

"Ah, ha! Aunt Teresa, I'll tell papa on you! I'll tell him you are talking with the people at Schillingscourt. You told me not to speak to anybody over there, and you do it yourself!"

A door opened and closed with a noisy clatter; then the woman disappeared also. Mercedes looked in vain for her reappearance, until hasty footsteps receding from the hedge told her she had followed the boy to the house.

How strangely Mercedes felt. She had stood face to face with Felix's mother. She had entertained a bitter hatred against this female tyrant, and since her first view of the Cloister House, from whence her father's first wife had been chosen, she had experienced a feeling of contempt, mingled with a sensation of contact with something low, in associating the inmates of such a place with her father and brother. This feeling had vanished at sight of the fine, haughty-looking matron. She now considered it possible that she might have been Major Lucian's early love, and she began to understand why her brother was so anxious to propitiate this mother and win her affection for his little ones. The cold, hard exterior that hid a glowing soul was the enemy they had to do battle with. The iron nature of the Wolframs, this had made her what she appeared, and this had caused her to turn away from the womanly emotions away down in her heart, as if they were untrustworthy counselors. Mercedes acknowledged a secret sympathy with such a nature—but singular problem that it was, this woman, who had made herself such a power in the lives of her own, with her unyielding will, had but now retreated before the malicious threat of a child! Mercedes heard

the reopening of a door, followed by a harsh, masculine laugh, accompanied by a few scornful utterances, that appeared to affect the woman to whom they were addressed but little. She replied with unruffled calmness. Every word fell distinctly upon Mercedes's hearing.

"Am I your prisoner, Frank, or are we to stand in the relation of guardian and ward toward each other in our declining years? Let me alone! Why should I not ask how the child is doing, for whose sickness we are to blame?" With these words the door was closed, and all was silent.

Like one in a dream, Mercedes returned to the house. The lamps were lighted, and a stream of light fell upon her from the hall; but, at the first step, she started back in surprise. The opposite door was open, and a tall figure, followed by a second, less gray-clad and apparition-like in soundless movement, glided in, and swept familiarly and searchingly along the marble entrance.

"Great God! what a beggarly looking house!" a peevishly hysterical voice exclaimed. "The doors are spread open as if it were a public-house, and not a servant in sight! Pray, Adelaide, ring the bell as hard as you can."

The lady in black went to the vestibule and did as she was bid; but the bell made no sound. She then hastened toward the southern corridor, and called imperiously:

"Robert! Where are you?"

The commanding tones resounded to some purpose; half a dozen servants came to the call, headed by Robert, who humbly stammered:

"Pardon, my lady, I had only gone to the kitchen for a drink of water. Your ladyship came so unexpectedly."

The baroness silenced him with a motion of impatience, and asked, with angry pettishness:

"What does this neglected condition of my house mean? The doors wide open, as if it were a tavern, the bell toneless with rust, the garden gas not lighted, and "—she lifted the trail of her dress, which was fringed with straw—"since when has it been customary to turn the garden walks and halls into bedding for horses?"

The gardener was mute and confused, but Robert began to explain.

"We are none of us to blame for that, gracious mistress; indeed we have all been mad enough to fight about the way things have been going on in this house the past weeks. The baker left the front door open behind him as usual, and I am not allowed to lock the door because the bell has been taken

down, not rusted, as your ladyship supposed. The gas in the garden has not been lighted, the fountain's water turned off, and the streets and walks covered with straw, simply because a child belonging to the people stopping here has been sick with typhus, or some other fever like that."

Mercedes could scarcely resist the impulse to step forward and declare this to be false, that it was neither typhus nor any contagious disease, but she seemed rooted to the spot. To meet this woman for the first time, in the presence of impertinent servants, would not do. To force herself to meet her at all, and express a polite gratitude for the hospitality enjoyed would be a severe trial. The long gray visage was not an inviting one, and her face flushed with momentary rage as she exclaimed, holding her handkerchief to her nose: "Typhus! mercy! I trust the baron did not remain here during the time?"

The servants exchanged peculiar glances.

"Your ladyship knows the master fears nothing. He remained at the child's bedside day and night, as if it were his own."

The baroness turned to her companion with a fierce and questioning laugh. But this lady shrugged her shoulders, saying, coldly: "Are you surprised at that, Clementine?"

"Is the child still sick?" the baroness asked, suppressing her feelings, and pushing bits of straw from the hem of her dress with the point of her parasol.

"Oh, yes, your ladyship; he is far from being able to be up yet."

"Good heavens! how annoying! I have no disposition to inhale this vile atmosphere. Have disinfectants placed throughout the halls at once! Where is the baron?"

"He started for Berlin on the five o'clock train this evening," was the ready reply, as if the cunning man had been rolling this bit of delightful information under his tongue charged for this question. But if he expected his mistress to exhibit amazement he was disappointed, for she only flushed slightly, but not a feature changed. She lifted her eyes to the woman in black, however, and if Lucille had seen the fire in them she would have been obliged to retract her words—that the baroness had deathly lusterless orbs.

"Have you any recollection of seeing any hint of this trip in his last letter to me, Adelaide?"

The lady shook her head.

"Oh, your ladyship, that is easily explained," Robert ventured to remark. "He was himself in ignorance of it this

morning. Such unexpected journeys are nothing new here now. A few days ago one of the strange ladies went away just as suddenly and secretly as if she were going on the sly." Robert peered cautiously in the direction of the haunted apartments as if he feared being overheard. He had touched a tender nerve this time. The baroness rose to an imposing height, drew her veil over her face, and once more shook the clinging straw from her trained dress.

"Adelaide, we go to Berlin on the nine o'clock train," she exclaimed, in excited tones.

"Not so, Clementine," the other replied, dictatorially; "you require rest and repose. We remain here."

"Repose?" laughed the baroness. "I am going, and that immediately!"

Her companion approached her and laid her hand upon the golden cross resting on the bosom of the baroness.

"Clementine, see here; you are in danger of losing your cross on the way. What would our beloved abbess say to that? She gave you this memento with her own hands."

The eagerness died out of the tall woman's face as it bent over the ornament. She pressed it mechanically to her lips, while the speaker engaged herself in fastening the ribbon firmer about her throat.

"Go and prepare a dressing robe for your mistress," she ordered, as the maid appeared, laden with traveling wraps. "And tell Birkner to have the rooms put in receiving order at once."

"They are all ready," Birkner replied in person, coming upon the scene with a welcoming courtesy for the ladies. "Luckily the rooms have this very morning been thoroughly cleaned and aired."

"Indeed! notwithstanding my orders!" the baroness exclaimed. "Did I not distinctly say that *no one* should enter my apartment during my absence? I suppose my private property has become public use—I might have known it!"

"Your pardon, gracious mistress—no one would have ventured to enter the rooms had not the storm beat in the door, and broken the glass panes to the one opening on to the terrace. The place was in a horrible plight; the rain had beat in upon the dust that lay finger thick on everything. The glazier has been here, and the rooms are in order again."

While speaking the good old soul had approached nearer to her mistress, who retreated with repellingly extended hands, saying:

"Stay where you are, Birkner! And from this moment

never dare to enter my rooms again! Ah! my house must be cleansed of such pestilence!"

"Do not agitate yourself, Clementine," the canoness remarked, taking the baroness by the arm and leading her away, ordering supper to be served as she led the mistress of Schillingscourt up to her rooms, as if she were her ward.

The servants scattered; Birkner, good soul, wiping the tears from her eyes, and Robert remarked in a whisper to the gardener, pointing to the old housekeeper:

"She has got to go, that is fixed! God Himself can't save her now. She and Hanna are the only Protestants at Schillingscourt; they have been an eye-sore to my lady long enough, and still she didn't dare send either of them away, without the baron's consent before. Now, that she has been to Rome and to the convent—she looks as if she had been there—she is more decided, and Miss Riedt is mercilessly at her heels. Birkner has got to go!"

The odor of musk permeated the hall as Mercedes passed through on her way to her rooms, possibly the favorite perfume of one of the two ladies just gone upstairs. A gray veil seemed to have fallen over the place; Mercedes thought those heathenish figures standing about ought to come down from their pedestals and niches to creep into some dark corner to hide their nakedness; she wondered how they had been able to maintain their position this long in the face of such fanatical zeal.

Mercedes could not sleep that night; she did not seek her bed at all. It required all the native strength of her character and sound sense to collect the events of the day and arrange them for clear and concise consideration. Now was the time to stand firm. A hand, timid and uncertain as yet, was reaching over from the Cloister estate and seeking for the children of a disowned son.

CHAPTER XXIV.

With the break of day the hush that had pervaded for weeks at Schillingscourt was impudently broken, and the servants moved through the marble halls with noisy footsteps. Men were busy with rakes clearing away the straw about the premises. The fountains were playing merrily again, and cutting the bright morning air with their silvery sprays.

Mercedes watched the proceeding with composure. José had slept splendidly and awakened strengthened and refreshed, undisturbed by the noise around him. Little Pauly stood on

a chair at the window in Auntie Mercedes's room, and gazed delightedly upon the rainbow colors of the fountain waters as they were kissed by the morning sun. The wee creature looked like a blooming little elf, standing with her baby shoulders and golden curls rising above the pale blue, lace-trimmed frock. Mercedes, dressed in a white morning wrapper, stood at her side, her hand laid caressingly upon the pretty head—but her gaze wandering aimlessly into the distance. The baroness, accompanied by Miss Riedt, dressed as they were the previous evening, came into the garden at this moment. The large gold cross glittered upon the bosom of the gray dress, the gray gloved hands held a velvet-bound prayer-book. The ladies were evidently returning from early devotion at the Benedictine church in the vicinity.

The baroness looked even more worn and frail—more repulsive—than on the evening before, by lamp-light. Felix had said the woman was not the cold, passionless being she seemed—and the suppressed passions had gnawed consumingly upon this long angular exterior—her features were sharply drawn—she looked wrinkled and wasted as an aged woman.

Miss Riedt scrutinized the parterre closely. The laborers were still at work clearing away a last few stray bits of straw, but the baroness glanced covertly in the direction of the windows where Mercedes and the child stood. An instant they rested upon the picture, then the glance became one of amazement, to change as rapidly to fierce hatred. Then the head bowed upon that frail bosom again, and she passed on as if she had observed nothing.

Soon after the physician came—not from the street direct—the baroness had sought an interview with him before he came to see his little patient. He was an honest man, and his face expressed indignation. He requested Mercedes to avoid meeting her hostess (?), as that lady would persist in believing there was typhus fever in the house, and she had an insane fear of contagion. The halls are smoking with "burned offerings, as if the Grecian goddesses were holding a festival," the sarcastic gentleman remarked, alluding to the pans of charcoal standing about with their disinfectant properties.

He found his patient decidedly better, "But I beg of you, madame, be careful; a relapse is possible. I hold you accountable for his well-doing. He must not be moved at present."

It would be difficult to guess what the doctor feared after his visit to the baroness. He had become quite attached to José, and appeared to entertain the most profound respect for

Donna Mercedes. Whatever he may have heard upstairs, it was certain he was not influenced by it. He was more delicately respectful, if possible, than before, and at José's pleading permitted the piano to be opened for the first time since the little fellow was taken sick.

Mercedes opened the instrument and began a soft prelude. She was not a genius by any means, nor a brilliant performer. Her nature rebelled at anything like tame practice, as the blooded horse rebels at the bit. She played wildly harmonious, as if the sounds carried her chained soul in them. She loved her piano because she could talk to it. She played on no other musical instrument.

A thrill of pleasure beamed from her face as her fingers touched the keys again, but she only played a Beethoven symphony, and touched the keys softly, that the notes might not jar upon the invalid's nerves. The mellow tones were suggestive of the conservatory—the studio—the man with the square forehead whose taste had made it so poetical. The crowding thoughts vexed her. She suddenly dashed off into a wild melody, that made José hold his breath and the doctor lean back in his arm-chair and listen with utter satisfaction.

Directly the door was opened, without any previous knocking for admittance, and Robert rushed in, as if he were the bearer of some hasty and important news.

"My lady the baroness requests you not to play. Music is not permitted around Schillingscourt. Even the hand-organs are never allowed to stand in front of the house, because my lady can not endure music."

"Is it possible?" laughed the doctor. "Not even hand-organ music? But how is it that she happened to hear the piano? her apartments are remote from here."

"The ladies are breakfasting on the terrace, and the noise can be heard there plainly."

"The witches!" the old doctor grumbled, taking his hat for departure, while Mercedes rose and closed the piano.

The servant remained, but Mercedes did not appear to notice his presence, and the impudent soul, who felt himself authorized to show an insulting manner toward the guest not noticed by his mistress, advanced a step nearer and extended a paper.

"If you please," he began.

Mercedes measured him from head to foot, with a glance so majestic that he involuntarily retreated, and said more humbly:

"I have here an account. The lady that went away did not

pay for the carriage she came in. I settled with the driver; there are also other little expenses that I made note of. I have presented the paper to the baroness; she says it's no affair of hers."

"Your mistress is right. You will go to my servant Jack with such matters."

Robert smiled, as such beings smile upon people who are supposed to be "paupers."

"I have never seen him have any money, and go to headquarters, on principle, with such things."

Donna Mercedes compressed her lips like one suffering torture. She silently unlocked the chest that had been so heavy to carry when she arrived. It was filled to the brim with gold pieces.

"Take what belongs to you!" said she.

He started back, as if a flame had risen out of the chest to scorch him. He had entered the room confident he would not find a penny of indemnity, and here stood a chest full of gold as carelessly guarded as if it were dust.

He was crushed. Humbly he bowed to this lady who had such oceans of gold, saying:

"Oh, gracious, madame, I can not do that!"

"Take; do as I bid you!" said she, imperiously.

Timidly he took up one of the gold pieces, and felt in his pocket for his purse.

"It does not amount to so much. There is more than half due you in change," said he, beginning to count some trifling pieces of money upon the table before the picture of "Poor Valmaseda," the South Carolina Crœseus.

Mercedes pointed to the door.

"Go! Never trouble me in like manner again. My servants attend to my affairs; when you are wanted in my rooms you will be sent for."

The man pocketed the gold piece quickly, and hastened out of the room, muttering:

"Ass! blockhead that I have been! How I have cheated myself all this time!—well, it's too late now. Fritz," said he to the porter, "I've been mistaken; all the gold and glitter in there is real; and the niggers too—and such piles of money! —gold, I tell you, gold! chests full of it!"

Mercedes stood lost in thought; an expression of disgust mingled with painful surprise rested on her face. The limitless impudence of the German servants in this house had at last reached a point from whence she began to see what it meant. She had at last found a weapon of defense. What her

individuality had failed to inspire—the respect due a guest from a domestic—her gold had suddenly won for her; and this was hospitality! Blind that she had been to judge and act in the house Baron Schilling had offered as a refuge to the children of his friend as she would have expected others to act in her house, were the circumstances changed. What a wholesome lesson!

She thought of the cellar keys carried away by the baroness. This lady was not only maliciously artful—she was penurious as well. Mercedes wondered whether she would be justified in offering to pay—no, the rudeness was an insult. Could she venture to send the lady some jewels? What would he think of such a proceeding. She covered her troubled eyes with her hands, and leaned back in her chair to consider.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE fervently longed for mistress of Schillingscourt had returned; but the anticipated "fun" of the spitefully inclined domestics did not take place. The lady had been prostrated by the shock she had received when she found her house in such a state of confusion on her arrival, and the absence of her husband had not conduced to the welfare of the lady's delicately irritable nervous organization. She had resigned herself to remaining at home when informed by her favorite Robert that the baron was expected back in the course of a few days—but the fact did not improve the temper of the "gracious mistress"—she even declined to see Minka; "the little black canaille" had also been in the convent.

The pans with their smoking disinfectant were not to be removed until the baron returned and witnessed the distress and discomfort he had subjected his invalid wife to. His protégées were not molested—but they were utterly ignored—Mercedes avoided meeting the ladies, and retired from the windows as soon as they appeared in going and coming from their visits to the Benedictine church morning and evening.

Mercedes naturally experienced a sensation of just indignation when she saw this woman, who did not consider her husband's guests worthy of the common courtesies due even a stranger beneath his roof, and whose supercilious nature thus set aside the simplest rules of politeness and good-breeding; but the nameless feeling of antagonism that rose in rebellion against this being, with her gray trail and generally colorless *ensemble*, was a puzzle to herself.

Two days had gone by. The third was eventful with won-

dering whether the baron would bring back with him the runaway. She felt confident whatever his report might be, he would not come to her room with his news, after saying he would meet José again only when he was well enough to come to him in the garden.

About the time the afternoon train from Berlin was due she left José with Hanna, and went to the greenhouse to await the baron's return. Pauly was romping near the studio in Deborah's charge.

The atelier door between the conservatory and studio was wide open; the curtain was drawn back, giving Mercedes a full view of the remarkably artistic arrangement of the interior from where she sat in her retired nook under the myrtle vines of the greenhouse. She endeavored to pass the waiting minutes in reading the book of poems she had brought with her, but she was too anxious with her own expectations to become interested in her book. Suddenly Pirate set up a terrific barking. Strangers were evidently approaching; Mercedes drew back further in her green retreat, but the barking ceased and no one drew near the greenhouse entrance, but a moment later the Gobelin curtain on the gallery in the studio was pushed aside, and the baroness appeared with noiseless footsteps. Miss Riedt followed.

"I dislike going down there," the latter remarked. "Everything has been carefully put away up here, as you convinced yourself yesterday; and there, where all is open to the public eye, to a certain extent, you will not be likely to meet with better success in your search."

The baroness, however, ignored the advice, and glided down the winding stairway.

Mercedes trembled. She could not escape without being seen—and she would not have come in contact with the lady, before the baron's return, for any price.

"I have never been here before," the baroness said, with spiteful satisfaction, taking a sweeping view of the place. "I have kept my vow that I would never enter the place, or countenance his 'profession,' until this hour—and he will never know that I have broken it now. Just look around you, Adelaide. Is it not a ridiculous sight? My money should not have been wasted for such trash; he knew that well enough. What a senseless spendthrift he is! He pays enormous sums for litter like this, just as he pays atrocious prices for the wines those beggars he entertains guzzle!"

The speaker gesticulated vehemently, and suddenly glided into the greenhouse, in her noiseless fashion, and locked the

door leading into the garden, placing the key in her pocket, as if she might thus only be secure, saying:

"The servants are tattlers—and he need not know I have been here."

Mercedes felt like a culprit indeed, and found herself in a most undesirable position; but there was no help for it now, but to keep quiet and await the result. She experienced a repugnance in being forced to play the spy upon this spying wife, but to discover herself now and demand the key of exit would be fruitful of ill only.

The baroness re-entered the studio and went from case to case, opening every drawer. Most of them contained sketches and etchings. She was evidently hunting some tell-tale bit of paper or letter. Her companion remained standing as if rooted before the easel, and an exclamation of vindictive anger escaped her lips.

"Leave off your despicable spying, Clementine, and come here and see for what your indolence is to blame!" she said.

"Good heavens! what have you to complain of now?" the other replied, petulantly. She had just found an envelope, and was studying the letters of the superscription with jealousy-flashing eyes.

"Is not this a lady's handwriting?" she queried, extending the envelope.

"I never meddle with other people's letters," was the coldly reprimanding reply. "What are you so meanly inquisitive for? Suppose it contained proofs of your husband's faithlessness"—the wife's face glowed at these words—"it would not make him as guilty in our eyes as this picture. Look!"

But the baroness did not seem inclined to "leave off spying" to look at a picture, and pettishly retorted:

"Oh, pshaw! You won't look at his letters, and I won't look at his pictures!"

"Alas, that it is so!" the woman sternly replied. "You boast of never having entered his studio; and I now realize that your place was here night and day for the purpose of preventing an outrageous and world-wide scandal. This picture is of the vilest significance and tendency ever yet presented to the public! Do you see that apostate, that female heretic, who has been cast out of the blessed by the Almighty anger? She bears the halo of a martyr—her face is glorified, while that of her pursuers, who hold the weapon of true religious zeal, are presented as if they were fiends and blood-thirsty devils! And such things come to life and color from his brains while

you are walking at his side, thinking only of your egotistical desire to make your husband a sighing slave to your passions!"

The baroness stood beside the vehement speaker in a trice.

"Shameful!" she exclaimed, glaring wrathily at the girlish form, over whose partly draped bosom the mother was trying to throw the scarf covering her own white hairs. "What a licentious idea! And yet he acts so reserved and ascetic—while secretly studying and reveling in such sinful indecencies!"

Donna Mercedes plainly saw the contemptuous face of the canoness as she turned her big, fiery eyes upon the speaker.

"I see nothing sinfully indecent there," she replied. "The most pious monks have transferred the human body in all its nude beauty to their pictures. The sin is embodied in the idea the picture presents. It makes my blood boil when I think that here in your home such a blow is aimed at our Church; everywhere Catholicism is attacked, and the faithful threatened. And here, here upon the ground stolen from our Church, stands this blasphemous picture! What care I for the documentary rights of the Schillings and that heretical family on the Cloister estate? The spot of earth once consecrated to the Church is unalienable, and belongs to her forever; though she be cheated out of her rights for centuries, eventually she will have her own again, and it is the duty of every true Catholic to aid her by every means, human or divine!"

With a movement of unspeakable hatred she turned her back upon the picture, adding, vindictively:

"Oh, would that I had the rights of a wife or the authority of ownership! I would break the brush before his insolently sacrilegious eyes and dash the colors in the dust at his feet. I would not leave a thread of that canvas together, though I had to tear it to atoms with my teeth!"

Like one castigated, the baroness turned away, just as Pirate once more began to bark, but with evident canine joy—some one had released him from his chain.

"I should like to poison that beast!" the baroness remarked. But the heart of the woman hidden in the myrtle beat fearfully. She knew the baron must have unchained Pirate. He would probably enter the studio through the private door leading to the gallery—and there stood his wife with the confiscated envelope in her hand, and one of the case doors, through which she had been rummaging, still ajar, unconscious of her compromising situation. Mercedes, with a noble, womanly impulse, was just about to give a warning cry of the baron's approach—but it was too late; the baron stepped out on the gallery, with Pauly on his arm. The little one clung to his

neck with both arms, in childish delight at the meeting with her beloved friend again. Pirate pressed his way past him and raced like mad down the stairs toward the startled ladies; the envelope fluttered upon the floor from the hand of the baroness. But the lady's self-possession was disturbed only for an instant. She slyly pushed to the case door, in lifting her hand as if in alarm from her dress, against which Pirate was bounding dog fashion.

"Do you want that brute to murder me?" she called up to her husband.

"Here, Pirate!" the gentleman exclaimed, and the dog bounded up the stairs again, and was put out of the door behind the curtain.

"I am sorry for the fright I have occasioned you, Clementine; but the dog is not as dangerous as he looks," the baron said, coming down, Pauly still cuddled to his neck so closely that her blonde curls mingled with his beard. A painfully ironical smile played about his mouth as he noticed the letter lying at her feet. "I had not the remotest idea that you were at home, and certainly could not dream of seeing you here—here. It is really a surprise, Clementine."

He bowed distantly to her companion, and extended a hand to his wife.

"I shall not shake hands with you while you have that child on your arm," she said, chillingly. "I want no strangers present at our meeting after such a long absence."

His eyes turned with a meaningly sarcastic glance upon the canoness who stood near mute, with arms crossed upon her bosom.

"Adelaide is no stranger!" was the pettish reply.

"And Lucian's child is very dear to me," said he, putting the little one down and taking her tiny hand in his own. It was not extended to his wife again; her weak limbs refused to hold her any longer, and she tottered to the nearest chair with a moan: "I am suffocating, Adelaide—my salts!"

The little flask appeared from the pocket of the lady in black, and the baron opened some of the windows that were closely draped, saying:

"I am afraid the studio has been badly ventilated during my absence."

"Oh, it is not that!" the fainting lady exclaimed, "or I should have died over in that pest-laden air at the house! Poor me and Adeladie have done what we could to protect ourselves from contagion."

"What! has Jose's sickness assumed a dangerous phase?" the baron cried, in alarm.

"José? Who is José?" the baroness queried, with a languid air. "Do not imagine I have taken the time and pains to inquire into your affairs sufficiently to familiarize myself with names. I only know that I found the house in a most disreputable condition—the servants demoralized, and no discipline whatever, under that stupid housekeeper, Birkner, who shall receive her walking-papers this time, without mercy.

"Indeed?"

"Indeed—yes! I shall certainly discharge her—rest assured of that! Oh! how I suffered the evening of my return from the peaceful holy abode where my girlhood was passed—to find a comfortless home and no welcome—my husband gone!"

"My absence was in consequence of a duty I could not avoid."

"Oh, of course! to run after a dancing female."

There was a sharp retort upon his lips, but he repressed it. But the look he gave the frail, pale women, told better than language could express what a tortured, miserable man he was, notwithstanding his declaration to Lucille to the contrary.

"You mean Lucian's widow, Clementine," he quietly remarked. "I have nothing to do with the Fournier dancer."

"Oh, dear! such subtle hair-splitting distinctions are too much for my simple comprehension; however, suit yourself. Such a pretty little widow is doubtless a stage attraction for some gentlemen. Apropos—this Donna de Valmaseda is also a widow, I understand. You forgot to communicate this interesting fact."

"Did you not distinctly tell me you did not wish to be bored with Lucian's affairs?"

"Good Lord! Who is talking about those old concerns?"

Mercedes felt as if she must fly from her hidden corner, and put an end to the conversation. She saw the flush rise to his face as her name was mentioned, but guilty embarrassment lamed her limbs.

"Does the fact of the lady being a widow make any difference in her attitude toward me? I promised Lucian I would receive his children. It is of no importance to me who brought them—"

"But to me! This woman, with her plantation airs and manners, is an abomination to me. She suggests the whip, and looks as if she had practiced its use. These aristocratic

slave-owning ladies are notorious for their overbearing tyranny. They have villainous tempers, I am told."

He made no reply, but stooped to speak to Pauly, who appeared surprised at not being noticed and petted, as ladies were in the habit of doing when they saw the fair babe.

"Come, Pauly, let us go in and find Deborah and Pirate," said he, lifting the little one in his arms and going up the stairs with her.

"He is not looking well, and has come home in a bad humor," the canoness remarked, when he had disappeared behind the Gobelin curtain.

The baroness jumped up spiritedly and began to arrange things as she had found them, and restored the letter from whence she had taken it. "I'll settle that humor for him," said she; "but to see him carrying that young one about as if he were a child's nurse—caressing the ugly tow-head so tenderly—that is what maddens me!"

"An unusual demonstration of affection on the part of childless men," was the peculiarly emphasized rejoinder.

The baroness glared upon the speaker with wrath-distorted face; a flood of vituperation seemed hovering upon her tongue; but at this instant the baron began to rattle the lock of the conservatory door. He had left the child with Deborah and returned by the garden entrance.

The baroness involuntarily placed her hand upon her pocket; the next moment a key turned in the lock, and her husband entered, saying:

"Why, Clementine, did you fly into the studio? I found the doors locked on the upper and lower entrance, and this one also."

"I got a key from Robert. I thought it would do no harm to look after things here a little during your absence."

"You are very kind. A heroic self-sacrifice on your part, in my behalf, to conquer your aversion to the place simply to see that it is kept in proper order. You found the floors badly swept, envelopes scattered about, and spying servants leaving drawers and doors open while caught in the act of investigating and prying into my private affairs; I see you have been kind enough to clear away the traces of their detestable inquisitiveness."

If she experienced any shame at being discovered in her questionable undertaking, she gave no outward evidence of it. Lifting her train and giving it a slight shake, she replied, with the utmost composure:

"Yes, you are lamentably served; it is very dusty here

But it seems to me you are annoyed at my presence. Do not fret—I shall come no more. But I am glad that I have, for once, overcome my dislike to the place, and taken a glance at what it contains. That picture on the easel—do you contemplate giving it public exhibition?"

"Certainly, it is going to Vienna."

"This glorification of rank heresy you have the face to present to the world as your work?"

"Shall I deny my own child?" he laughed, good-humoredly, as he drew near the easel, as if to protect that favorite "child," his pet creation.

"A degenerate one!" exclaimed his wife. "Ask Adelaide."

"What! a criticism from those lips?" he cried, with withering scorn. The canoness and the baron were bitter enemies—from the bottom of their hearts they despised each other, and their glances met as the words left his tongue.

"Pray, do not imagine," she retorted, equally cutting, "that I have any desire or would exert myself to study the technicalities of your art. It is not my vocation. Color and outlines interest me but little, and general features and motives do not attract my attention, as a rule; but a corrupting idea that the pencil and brush endeavors to immortalize excites me to indignation. This apostatical woman here"—she pointed to the dying Huguenotess—"wears the expression of a glory-inspired martyr."

"And justly so. Or shall I falsify history to oblige a bigoted canoness?"

"As if the whole picture were not a vile falsehood!" she exclaimed, with a fury she strove to suppress in speaking. "That sacred night called Bartholomew's night, every hand that directed a weapon at a Huguenot heart was the chastising hand of God himself!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Riedt, but I can not have the quiet of my studio disturbed by doctrinal bickerings."

"And are not you exciting such contentions by your works in the most criminal manner?"

"Ah, to be sure! every reasoning mind and every thinker who ventures upon making a stand for truth is marked a criminal! He is accused of profane tendencies—but I believe I have already remarked that your criticism is superfluous. Wherever you have secured a footing, Miss Riedt, you manage to maintain your ground, and spread like a creeping plant over the territory, absorbing whatever might have been good in your dangerous fibers. Thus you have forced yourself into my house, and made yourself master over a woman whose natu-

rally obstinate nature scarcely required such training. I have retired from the field—I leave it to you. I have no wish to continue battling for a place that is daily and hourly barricaded anew with an almost insane fanaticism. And here, in the holy presence of my art—my never-ceasing fountain of joy and comfort—all that I have to live for, here the owls and bats shall not enter—"

"Arnold!" The baroness sprung toward him and grasped his arm with both hands, her face expressive of intense dismay and pain. "Arnold, unsay that—take those words back! You do not mean that you love your art better than your wife? No, no! it can not be!"

He stood unmoved.

"I have spoken the truth. I have chosen my art—she uplifts and ennobles. She does not drag me into dark, abject corners to find only deceit, falsehood, tyranny, and the vacillating moods that rule the heart of woman—she is always true and loyal."

"Have I not been true to you?"

"You cultivated the friendship of my enemy—a woman who has sown discord between us. Let her deny, if she can, honestly, that she has spoken to you of your husband in terms of reproach; instigated you to rebellion—made complaints."

"Are you then so sinless and perfect that you give no cause for complaining?" the canoness scoffingly asked.

A scornful smile flitted over his face.

"A diplomatic evasion, Miss Riedt, a speech that does the Cloister missionary justice. I am not sinless and perfect. The Schillings are of the earth earthy, and I am a fair representative of the race in character, and they were not celebrated for lamb-like natures or notoriously submissive husbands. I am afraid I can not point out even one who was tied to his wife's apron-string. They have doubtless been hard creatures to manage, but in the annals of our house there is no record of a faithless wife who permitted a contumacious attack upon her husband's honor behind his back, much less make such an attack herself."

He bowed lightly as he finished speaking to the canoness, and opened wide the door leading into the garden—then turned to go up into the gallery.

"You order Adelaide out of our house?" the baroness exclaimed, enraged.

"I think it is not the first time," he replied, pausing with his hand on the baluster at the foot of the stairs. "But as Miss Riedt is following the dictates of a 'higher mission,' she

is not likely to be affected by a possible womanly intuition suggestive of so delicate a hint, that has failed in effecting the desired end heretofore. Some men might resort to stronger measures in banishing an evil spirit from their homes—I abstain, and simply request to be left undisturbed in the isolation of my studio in future. I shall not enter the house as long as your visitor remains."

He hastened up the steps and disappeared behind the drapery of the gallery.

The baroness made an impulsive movement to follow him, but the canoness was at her side, like a black demon clutching at a retreating soul. She uttered no word, but laid hold of the hand turned toward the gallery, and led the excited woman away. There was angry, willful protest upon the long, thin face, and she wrenched herself free from the vise-like grip; but she followed the form, nevertheless, that led to the conservatory door, as if determined not to leave by the one the "master of the house" had opened for her benefit.

"Put that key back in its lock," she ordered.

The baroness obeyed, taking the key from her pocket, and with tremulous tones, hoarse with excitement and pleading, cried:

"Leave, Adelaide, I beg of you!"

"I remain!" was the determined reply. "That wretched man shall not move me from my purpose. I shall be more steadfast than ever, since I have such a pitifully weak nature to support. How many times have you not promised to escape from these miserable fetters? When you are with us, you act as if you abhorred all earthly emotions; you play piety to perfection, and the faithful guides of our youth believe firmly in your purity and cleanness of soul, and fancy you simply the sacrifice of the speculative old baron who made the match. You knew how to blindfold them to the truth, but you can not deceive me! If they all believe Schilling holds on to you for your wealth, and insists on keeping you from the order to which you belong body and soul for your money—I know better! I know you will not return, because you feed your unholy passion for him on the slender hope that he will yield to you in time. You have made a compact that you will return with me if ever Schilling gave you proof that he did not love you. He has done so now; his language, his actions not only denied his love for you, but evidenced absolute loathing. He never loved you—never!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

At last the way was clear. With beating heart, Mercedes fled from her retreat into the garden. She saw Deborah and little Pauly flitting about among the trees. Pirate had been chained again, but he barked furiously after the ladies going toward the Column House.

As soon as Pauly saw her auntie, she ran joyously to meet her, carrying a box of toys, and displaying also proudly the many things scattered about that Uncle Arnold had brought from Berlin for the little one. There was not a word about the child's mamma. Mercedes did not know whether to be glad or sorrowful at the little lady's appearance. So much had happened to occupy her mind within the last few days that solicitude for Lucille had become a secondary thought. She dreaded the meeting between herself and the man she had unwillingly spied upon during a most distressing scene.

She had been treated with such loving consideration by parents and friends that the possibility of brusque usage from him, after the stormy interview with his wife, caused her to wish the meeting with him were over. His remarks about the dark corners of a woman's heart and her vacillating moods were like dagger-thrusts to her. He had chosen his art in preference to woman's love. Art was loyal and true. A woman had nerves and feeling, and earth's dust lay upon her soul; hence she could not take flight into ideal regions that floated so loftily above the evil tongues of humanity.

Such thoughts filled her mind while sitting beside the playing child, until she heard his footsteps approaching. He appeared surprised to see her in the garden.

"I was about to send you word of my return by Deborah," said he, with a distant bow.

"And Lucille?"

"Madame Lucille Fournier, as the theatrical cards announce, will make her third appearance on the boards this evening," he replied, with a meaning glance toward Pauly and her colored nurse.

Taking the hint, Mercedes joined him, and they continued the conversation as they slowly promenaded along the sycamores.

"There is no thought of the lady's return. She laughed in my face at the suggestion, asking me where the chains and

handcuffs were—for by such force only could she be dragged back into the old life—and whether I really fancied she would creep obediently back under your wings like a frightened little chicken that had caught sight of the hawk, and once more devour home-made bread, after partaking of golden manna in the present paradise? I left her, shaking the dust from my feet," he continued, earnestly. "It is no longer a question of whether she is willing to return—she *can not* return! The few years of her life spent at Lucian's side have perished out of memory, and this new existence is so unalterably connected with her mother's associations that no trace of the eight wedded years is left in her bearing. Her rooms are thronged with fast men—the ancient fop, Prince Kousky, the central figure. As he was formerly ever at the beck and call of her mother, he now hovers about the new star of the theatrical world. I had considerable difficulty in gaining admittance to her presence—a guarding secretary arranging admitting preliminaries. Two gentlemen of my acquaintance were there before me. The little lady reclined upon a couch robed in a white silk wrapper; a pet cur nestled in her lap, wearing a diamond necklace, that the fond lady had wantonly strung about its silken neck. She met me with a merry laugh.

"How I despise her!" Mercedes muttered, savagely, between her teeth.

"You would probably have told her as much?" the baron remarked.

"Surely! such a scene would have disgusted me."

"If the wise secretary would have granted you admittance."

Mercedes looked up indignantly; he was probing her pride rather severely.

"I know you would be subjected to many annoyances if you had resolved to see Lucille," he continued, not noticing her angry start, "and I was prepared for such little thorns myself," he laughed, pleasantly, showing his beautiful white teeth. "She threatened me with half a dozen duels, because I declared she should never obtain Pauly—under present circumstances."

"No, never!" exclaimed Mercedes. "A change is taking place over there," she pointed to the Cloister House. "The time is not far distant when authority must be transferred to other hands." She then related the incident of her meeting with Mrs. Lucian at the hedge. "And strange, most strange," she added, "this much-scorned woman, she whom I considered a bitter enemy, is the only one with whom my nature seems to affiliate since I have felt German ground under my feet."

The baron listened in amazement. "She awakens an affinitive sympathy in my heart."

"Yes; it is the satanic element that puzzles us to find out whether these women with dark flashing eyes really are endowed with hearts, or whether it is their misfortune to follow the bent of a rule that creates only misery instead of giving happiness. This species of female character is like the flower that meanly absorbs its own fragrance; consumes itself and dies before the glowing bud bursts into blossom—a flame that smolders upon its perishing hearth-stone, and lends no glorious warmth to humanity. My darlings, I pity them in such hands."

"Then I must be a very cruel and heartless person," Mercedes retorted, spiritedly, but with a tremor in her voice nevertheless, "for I do not pity them. Felix was not mistaken. The woman over there will guard and care for the children like a man, and love them as only a true woman can love. You acknowledge the congeniality of certain elements in our natures, hence you will allow that I am competent to judge of hers. Thus I know that remorse and regret are trying to burst that self-consuming bud, and the flame will come to the surface, and this 'meanly absorbing' love may be of a very differently concentrated power from that of the tamely compliant affection of a more gentle nature, that has a soft warmth for all the world, and beams upon all with its moon-like light. I shall be consoled, and find comfort in the thought that I have left my dear ones under the protecting care of their grandmother."

"Do you think of leaving them?" he asked, quickly.

"Well, yes; I'm going home to *amuse* myself," she replied, with sarcastic emphasis. "Have I not deserved it honestly after my German experience."

"Truly, you have," he rejoined, his face flushing deeply. "You are justified in hastening the end to your martyrdom, and I would be the last to wish you to prolong it even an hour beyond absolute necessity. But we shall have to wait the fulfillment of our sanguine hopes in regard to the old lady yonder."

Mercedes felt the solid earth waver beneath her feet. His words contained a rude shock for her self-esteem. There was a time when people had declared night approached at her departure. Was all the charm and beauty of her youth a thing of the past? She used to be disgusted with the open admiration she excited, but the attraction of her presence had no

effect upon this stoical German who was so indifferent to her coming or going.

She toyed savagely with the large promenade fan she carried, and handled it as if it might be a riding-whip. This action, together with the haughtily curved mouth and flashing eyes, was suggestive of the baroness's remark, that these slave-owning ladies were capable of using the chastising rod with their own hands. The baron watched her keenly, as he said: "But this sacrifice may be spared you if you will consent to leave future developments to me."

"Ah! You would imply that my presence is superfluous!" she cried, impulsively, and with quivering voice. "Schillingscourt is a home for the children of your friend Felix, and as such it is all that your kindness can do for them; but they require also a woman's affectionate care. They need it as a flower needs sunshine, and up there"—she pointed with her fan toward the second story of the Column House—"is a lady, your wife, Baron Schilling, whose heart is sealed against childhood, whose eye is offended when it happens to turn upon a little face at the window."

"You have been vexed—hurt."

"Do you think I would permit any one to 'hurt' me?" she retorted, indignantly. "I intended no complaint. I can not blame the lady for objecting to the noise and disturbance of children in her quiet home, and, under such circumstances, the burden and responsibility of the children can not be an agreeable one to you."

"I am fully competent to manage it," he replied, cold and decisively. "However, my proposition did not originate from any motive beyond the fact that you seem so anxious to leave this hated Germany. Felix asked too much of you. To be immured, as it were, here, and isolated, intellectually and socially, is a sacrifice, indeed, on your part. It is robbing you of weeks of precious youth. You have been accustomed to social triumphs and admiration, to luxuriate in all that life can offer and beauty and intellect command. The cold, gray sky of Germany, and the fish-blooded people here can not compensate you for what your sunny land holds out. There you will find—"

"Sir, sir! There I will find—four graves!" Her eyes filled with tears, but she lifted them to him but an instant in unutterable reproach, then left him and hastened to the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

On the Cloister estate there reigned a heavy spiritual atmosphere. The hired people pressed themselves into corners when the master's step was heard, and listened in terror to his voice that rang all the day long in fault-finding tones.

The senator had his cares and troubles. The coal mines developed undesirable features. Innumerable little water-falls and constantly running springs were beginning to be troublesome, and occasioned the master and the miners no end of anxiety. The mines lay in a valley of abundant fountains, and there had been considerable prognostication in regard to the undertaking of the avaricious Wolfram, who was said to be too mean to secure the mines properly for the safety of the miners; and, of course, if bad luck resulted, it was only to be expected.

The senator cared little for such gossip. He gathered in the dollars greedily, and cut down expenses wherever he could, until this water phantom rose, and broke into the mines like so many silvery swords, and demanded attention to obviate a possible calamity. The attending expense was what caused the senator's bad humor.

Mrs. Lucian did not appear to be affected by this threatened invasion upon her brother's pocket-book. She was never a talker, or given to discussing affairs with the people about the estate, but they were surprised because the intercourse between brother and sister seemed to have settled itself into a curt morning and evening greeting. However cross the senator might be on his return from the mine, and storm into the house with his tyrannical face, she paid no heed nor asked one question. She brought in the supper, removed her kitchen apron, and took her seat at the table silently. Guy did the talking alone.

But the lady had acquired a new and singular habit, that grew upon her daily more and more. She spent every spare moment from her household duties in the garden. She was either gathering vegetables or fruit, or busied herself with the bleaching-lines. The servant-maids declared she never allowed the bleaching to become dry, and was so constantly engaged with the watering-can that the young vegetables were in danger of being killed with too much care. The people also noticed that she passed a great deal of her time on the bench

near the hedge, staring into the neighboring garden—an extraordinary notion for the "proudly reserved mistress"—and most ridiculous, besides, to stand on a bench and show so much curiosity to see a "big, waddling negro woman from America." They did not dream that she might be looking at the child in the negro woman's charge.

Upon this particular day the senator's humor was really intolerable. The unhappy man had been forced to send for some persons who understood the nature of this perpetual water-flow, at a most heathenish expense. This was certainly most trying to his temper.

Soon after dinner, however, he had gone to the mine. Master Guy perspired under the lessons of his private tutor, who had no comprehension for tricks and jokes. The kitchen-maids got their heads together and giggled as they watched the lady of the house hasten toward the hedge, as usual, when the master went away. She had not touched the coffee served after dinner; in fact, she seemed to have forgotten how to eat and drink lately. Her pale face was getting very thin, and her dresses were beginning to hang loosely upon the elegant form. The servants remarked that though she said nothing about the mine losses, she grieved all the more, or she would not have been a Wolfram. She passed heedlessly by the early golden pears that had fallen ripe upon the ground. Her observation was keenly bent upon sounds from the other side of that thick hedge. She started at the slightest cry or noise, until she reached the bench, mounted it, and parted the branches of the hedge that obstructed her view.

The sound of wheels upon the gravel under the sycamore attracted her attention. Jack was carefully pushing a wheeled chair along the avenue. The gleaming of pale-blue silk cushions and spread could be seen through the shrubbery. The eagerly staring woman almost lost her balance as her eyes fell upon the white face and blonde curls resting on the blue pillow. Then the chair was turned about, and she heard the wheels crunch over the gravel until they halted near the atelier.

She stepped down from the bench and walked further along the hedge, and tried to part the branches there; but without avail. Then she carried a ladder that had been used in gathering fruit that stood near by to the end of the hedge, and leaning it against the old stone wall, mounted it until she had a view of—what she was seeking. She was mastered by one intense desire to look into the pale thin face in that rolling-chair, and convince herself that death had in reality retreated with its threatening hand.

She gazed into the little thicket of trees, and there, not fifteen steps from her, stood the chair, and José's face was turned toward her. It lay heavily among the cushions, and the golden waves of hair rested against a very delicate brow; but the expression was spirited, and the lips red as cherries, and this gave evidence of recovering strength and renewing vigorous blood.

There was no one with him but Jack, who was picking dandelions, and giving them to the little fellow to form into a chain with his little fingers. He seemed to inhale the fragrant, balmy air with pleasure as he amused himself thus contentedly, and his face beamed with childish satisfaction.

"Go and get Pirate, won't you, Jack?" he asked, as the dog's whining resounded from the studio.

"No, child, not yet; Pirate is so wild he will excite you. To-morrow, may be, I'll go and quiet him after awhile," the colored man replied, still gathering dandelions, deep in the grass at some distance from José.

The eager watcher's eyes glowed suddenly, as if with some irresistible power. She hurried down the ladder and fled toward the house by the back way, over the same dark passages followed by José some weeks ago, and entered the gable-room like some thief stealing in upon other people's property. She unlocked a closet containing silver-ware in a remote corner, where once the despised sponsor present had been stored, upon which the hated Lucian's name had been engraved. From this corner the lady took a small silver cup, heavily gold-lined, of beautiful workmanship and peculiar shape. This was also a sponsor present to the little Teresa Wolfram from a wealthy friend of the family. Quickly passing a dusting napkin over it, she dropped it into her pocket, and hastened into the garden again, as she had come.

One glance over the wall assured her that Jack had gone to quiet Pirate, and José was alone. Taking a key from the bunch at her girdle, tearing off her apron, she flung it from her, and with trembling hand inserted the key into the lock of a private door in the wall leading upon the street. It opened with a creaking groan—once before it had groaned like this, when clothed in snowy white, as he loved to see her, she had stolen away to fly into the arms of her loving soldier. One instant she hesitated now, but only an instant; then she stepped through the opening, and the door closed behind her.

A few steps brought her to the neighboring garden gate; this she knew was never locked during the day. The next moment she stood within it, under the shadow of the ancient

trees, like one in a dream. It seemed as if the form in the military dress must appear to fold her to his heart. The great yearning eyes of the woman sought the blue-cushioned chair; it and the golden hair resting there gleamed at her through the trees. The child had lifted his head at the sound of the opening gate.

He looked astonished, but not alarmed, as he saw the woman approaching. Then she stood beside him, pale, unable to articulate the words that moved her lips. Like a little prince, the boy reclined there, who so recently had strayed among the cruel darkness of the Cloister House. His wrapper was trimmed with finest lace, and the blue, pale silk-lined cloak thrown around him was clasped with a superb chain and amulet. The old cloth weavers would doubtless have shaken their heads, could they have seen the aristocratic being that had in its veins some of their hardy blood.

"Are you getting better?" she asked, bending over the boy, so close that his breath swept her cheek.

"Oh, yes, a great deal better—only I am so tired—and I want to play with Pauly and Pirate."

"Pauly is your little sister?"

"Yes; didn't you know it? See, is not this a pretty chain that I am making—will you have it?"

"Yes, dear child, and I will keep it." He hung the chain of dandelion rings over her hand, and she took it tenderly in one hand, while taking the cup from her pocket with the other, saying:

"I have something for you also. You must drink your milk out of this cup hereafter."

José grasped the beautiful gift with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, how lovely! I thank you." He lifted his arm to clasp her neck with an impulse of childish gratitude; and she, unable to resist, took the boy in her arms with a passion that would forget the loveless isolation of years—the remorse for cruelty—all the bitter, long, lonely past—in the burning tenderness of the kisses that were rained upon his face. Then conquering her emotion, she laid him back upon his pillow, saying:

"And you will think of me when you drink from this cup?" How soft and mild the words came from those lips! Who would have recognized that voice as hers?

"Yes; but what is your name?"

"My name?" The flush died from her momentarily ex-

cited face, leaving it paler than before. "My name," she repeated, again, "my name is—*grandmamma.*"

With these words she hastened away.

"Stay, won't you?" José cried, pleadingly.

She turned at the appeal, but Jack just then appeared, and with a farewell wave of her hand, she disappeared from his view, and the gate closed upon her.

Like one wandering in a dream, the woman re-entered the Cloister gate. Master Guy had escaped from his lessons and was chasing about the barn-yard like a savage imp. But the tender kiss of the boy, with his soulful eyes and affectionate manner, still lingered upon the woman's face. She had held him in her arms, this sweet child that would have graced a kingly palace with his beauty and gentleness; he was her own flesh and blood—the heart that had rested against her own, as if flowing back from whence it came—had received its origin from her, and belonged to her, regardless of the harsh command she had uttered: "I never wish to see you again—not even after death!"

Once she had believed it possible to forget and overcome, if one only had the stability. All these years she had hugged the empty name of her ancestors, and clung to their nature, as the oak reproduces its own knotty, hard nature, regardless of the fact that some branches may be misshapen and ugly. She wanted to overcome herself—and "forget" for the sake of this boy, who acted more like a wild beast than a thing of human instincts, who's cross eyes ever glowed for some victim to satisfy his cruel nature, who was a terror to every one, with his faculty for mischief and falsehood. One of the dairy-maids chanced to cross his path at this moment, carrying in each hand a bucket of milk. She was helpless, and the opportunity was not one the boy could overlook. His whip came down upon the girl's shoulder. She gave a cry of anger and pain. Mrs. Lucian sprung toward him, wrenched the whip from his hand, and threw it from her; he leaped at her like a wild cat. A shudder ran through her frame. This evil element must not touch her ever again. She kept him at bay with her fist raised.

"Keep away, or I shall whip you as long as I can lift my hand," she said, with a determination that he understood.

He had felt the strength of that hand once, and respected it.

"I'll tell papa on you when he comes; he'll fix you!" the boy screamed, running toward the house, where he had a store of other whips and clubs.

The senator, however, had returned; his sister saw him

standing in the door, when his hopeful had given the girl the blow with his ever ready whip, and just because he had not reprimanded the act, she had undertaken the duty herself.

She walked into the kitchen, and taking a pan of currants that had just been brought in, went into the dining-room and began to pick them preparatory to preserving.

Her brother had stationed himself at the window, the greenish light fell upon the still heavy, but thickly sprinkled with silver, hair. After watching her for some time he broke the silence by saying:

"Teresa, you have become so taciturn lately that I don't even know whether you are aware of the misfortune that threatens me at the coal mines?"

"It is the talk of the town."

"And does it not affect you at all? Are you utterly indifferent to the weal and woe of the Wolframs, Teresa?"

"I have long ceased to be interested in the weal and woe of the Wolframs," she replied, without looking up from her employment. "You train the one who will have the marring or making of it in his hands, according to your own ideas and principles, regardless of my advice. I have helped to increase the Wolfram wealth with my untiring industry and conscientious economy, this you will grant. I am glad to see our family prosper—but by honorable means only—as our fathers prospered before us. You have become a modern money-maker. You want to shovel it in by the sackful, and are not willing to spend enough to secure the ground under your feet. There is where the threatened danger comes in. You are to blame for the misfortune you lament."

"You don't understand such things!"

"Possibly not. Consequently, 'tis no affair of mine!" she replied, coolly, but her glance began to wander from her busy hands, and she added, quickly, "But this I do know, that I have always wished the coal had lain there undiscovered till the Day of Judgment. Since those mines have been opened, things have changed here sadly." A deep sigh accompanied the words. "Oh, to be sure, the Wolframs have become very wealthy, but the riches have flowed in upon us from a source that I do not like. I always feel as if blessings could not come with it, because a poor human being lost his life thereby."

The senator had been pacing the floor for a moment; at his sister's last words he paused, as if some spectral object had suddenly risen from the ground in front of him; then he burst into a coarse laugh.

"You have become logically intellectual with the years—like women in their dotage!" he exclaimed, scornfully. "So you imagine because a crazy servant, discharged by a bad master, happens to be mixed up in the affair, misfortune clings to my undertaking!" He laughed in forced merriment, and again added: "Well, if that is the case, I welcome the misfortune. What big eyes old Klaus Wolfram, our good, hard-working forefather, would make if he could see the present Wolframs in the glory of possessing the finest estate in the country—a great misfortune, truly!"

He walked to the window and began to drum upon the panes, covertly watching the effect of his words upon his sister. She continued composedly picking currants.

"You received the ten thousand dollars you had loaned the Zeigler estate yesterday; how do you think of investing it?" he suddenly inquired.

"I have not decided as yet."

"Let me have the money, Teresa? Sommerwise consumed all my disposable capital lately; and here this mine calamity comes upon me so unexpectedly. I must have ready money, and I dislike giving my note of hand. Your money is safe with me, Teresa; it is Wolfram money, and might as well contribute toward the enlargement of the general estate; as you have frequently intimated that all your property will some time—I hope the day is most remote—revert to the Wolfram name-bearer again."

"I have not made my will yet!"

A derisive smile distorted his face at these laconic words; he scrutinized the flushed face of the speaker. Was this the woman whose soul had lain in his keeping all these years?

"I am aware of that, Teresa, and I have no intention of hurrying you into such an act, although I am not a man to procrastinate about any necessary step; a thing that has got to be done may as well be done first as last. However, should you be taken away before me, rest assured not one penny of your money shall be touched by those upon whom the mother-curse rests—I will take care of that. I shall be prepared to carry out your wishes and mine; just as I managed your matrimonial affairs—that restored you to freedom."

Her lips were violently compressed—she uttered no word.

"But if we both live to a good old age the world will have forgotten that you ever changed your name for that luckless one, and you will be remembered only as a daughter of the Wolframs, and will share the splendor that the Cloister House will enjoy in the bright career of its new radiance."

"That boy yonder?" she motioned toward the yard where Guy was playing his pranks.

"Yes, that boy, our Guy," he replied, wrathily, on perceiving the questionable meaning of her ironical query.

"A fine career he promises, with his destructive character."

"Nonsense! The tricks of boyhood. I am, I flatter myself, thoroughly a man, and yet I used to break cups and jars to my heart's content, and never got caught at it. I pulled out the legs of every beetle and bug I could find, and ate frogs while they were still kicking—"

"Indeed! This is a phase in your nature I never suspected," was the sarcastic interruption. "The hired girls were scolded and dismissed for the broken crockery that our mother constantly had to replace—our good mother, who believed you to be a 'pattern son.' Who would have imagined you to be such a sly fellow?"

The senator scowled, and Mrs. Lucian's hand glided into her pocket, and her fingers clasped the chain of dandelion rings, and she felt as if a magnetic chain had connected her heart, that had denied its woman's longing tenderness so many, many years, with the little hand that had linked the stones. That sorely isolated heart was strong in asserting its right now in blissful emotion—dear little hands, surely they never tortured living things—there was no malice and deceit in that sweet face any more than in him whom she had cast out from heart and home.

"Youthful capers, Teresa, such as any spirited lad may be capable of. I merely wished to prove to you that such boyish and thoughtless tricks must not be taken into consideration when judging of the future man. Believe me, Guy will yet be a source of joy to you. He will be as a son to you, as he is to me."

He paused, for his sister threw out her arm as if warding off a blow.

"I have a son!" she shrieked, hoarsely. The struggle in her soul had reached a climax. The irresolution that had tortured the mother's heart for years had been decided with this cry—four little words: "I have a son!" Like a phenix out of the ashes of anger and resentment glowed the never-dying heart of nature, and mother-love triumphed.

"You have a son?" queried the senator, with withering mockery. "Pardon me, I had forgotten, or, rather, I was *ordered* to forget, the lamentable fact. There was a time when I feared a violent attack if I reminded you of such an existence." His head sunk upon his breast in a thoughtful

way, and he twisted nervously at his whiskers. "I see, Teresa; I see how it is. You are getting old—old, feeble. When people arrive at that stage their character becomes infirm also, and they cry '*Pater peccavi!*' Well, in that case a body may be permitted to speak of the past; or, better still, I will fetch you some Berlin newspapers. There you will read about the celebrated daughter-in-law of Mrs. Major Lucian. Your son is, of course, not mentioned; but don't be alarmed, for the husband of such dramatic celebrities are generally nonentities —mere shadows that trail at the heels of the grand ladies because they can not well get rid of them, and so must endure them as hangers-on, and make them useful as door-keepers or secretaries—surely a position that an ambitious mother may well be proud of. He need not work, he can subsist on the income of his wife's ballet prancing."

"You don't believe yourself what you are telling me," she muttered between her set teeth. She had laid aside her work, and the quick, painful breathing told of the fearful emotion raging in her bosom. "He has a profession; he is able to support himself."

The senator laughed rudely. "You think he is engaged making money as a lawyer while his wife travels all over Europe as a dancer?"

A sudden relieving thought illuminated his sister's face.

"Are you certain he is living with her?"

One moment the man hesitated while gazing studiously out of the window. Even a brutal nature may be momentarily reluctant to belie the dead. Then he shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"I must confess I have paid but little attention to a matter that I supposed was no concern of ours. It is a delicate subject to touch upon, and I have made no particular inquiry in regard to the movements of a disgraced and disowned member of our family. You speak as if you hoped the marriage with that person had been annulled. My dear Teresa, not every human being possesses the sense and resolution to shake off a disagreeable yoke, as you have done."

How he tortured her! She pressed her clutched hands to her breast, and turned her gaze slowly upon him.

"I must remind you that you always conducted yourself with masculine energy. You had rather cut a knot at one blow than bend under the hateful pressure; but such a knot once cut can not be united again, unless one is willing to draw upon themselves the disdain of God and man—and the present head of the Wolframs will know how to prevent a member of

his family from committing themselves. This is the first item to be considered. Then I would also remind you of your distinct declaration that not a sou of the money accumulated through generations of industry should ever be spent by a disreputable theatrical family. If you have changed your views and mind, well and good; but I have not!" His hard fist came down on the table with a bang. "I am here to reclaim that inheritance for the one who bears the Wolfram name, and for all those who shall follow!"

"That is the first item of consideration—the first and only one around which all the others revolve!" she cried, crushed and embittered with the suddenly dawning consciousness of her brother's real character.

"Think what you please—I shall do my duty!" was the cold reply. "But I advise you, Teresa, not to oppose me. Take heed. You and your dramatic family will get the worst of it! I give you fair warning!"

He walked to the window, and gave some orders to the men in tones as composed as if he had just been discussing an ordinary every-day matter.

His sister went up to her room.

She was not a woman to be moved from a purpose, or scared by threats. She would have laughed in her brother's face had she not been so utterly astonished by the painful discovery of his true nature. He had not counseled and stood by her from real brotherly and unselfish motives. He had supported her actions, and commended her resolutions, and helped to make her desolate, not from a sense of justice, but simply to gain for his own son her large inheritance.

Her eyes filled with tears, and a flush of mortification covered her face. Where were the iron props that had upheld her consciousness of right doing? They were props of prejudice and arrogance that had to disappear before the unseen power of external retribution. She had robbed herself. Her own pride and obstinacy had cheated her out of years and years, in which she could have been blessed and given blessings. These years appeared to her now like some horrible gulf, sunless and blossomless, in which she had willfully wandered, shutting her eyes from the heaven she might have enjoyed, and gathering stones—for what were the sums laid up but fruitless stones to her? And now they were to be raised as a pedestal under the feet of that miserable boy, whose very sight repelled her. No, no; it should not be!

She still saw before her a little season of joy. Only a few steps from her there was a sweet human fountain, from which

she could draw life for her soul's hunger. What was to prevent her from rushing over there into that house, where all would be changed? No! she could not humble herself so much just yet. She had taken the first step toward reconciliation. He would come to his mother, and make atonement less hard for her. Where, where was he?

It was a shameful falsehood. He did not let his wife support him. He was no idler; he had made place for himself among men, surely—perhaps in some foreign land, she thought—her mind reverting to the colored people who had charge of the children. She had recognized the little boy from her window in the gable-room, long, long ago. Such feature for feature resemblance and expression rarely repeats itself in humanity that is not related, and had not her heart gone out to him who bore her son's face and manners? This was blood affinity. It was needless for that strange lady in the park to tell her the boy's name was Lucian. But where was his father—her own boy?

Ah! perhaps, he had only sent his darlings, hoping they would creep into their grandmother's heart, and then bring him messages of her forgiving love. She had called herself grandmamma to his boy, and sent a token that he could not misunderstand, for he knew how she valued it. He would respond. Yes, he would certainly come, though weeks would pass before the distance between them was journeyed over, perhaps, and oceans to be crossed, but he would come. She would curb her intolerable yearning, and then— Was there still an unyielding nerve in this woman's nature?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WEEK had passed since Baron Schilling's return from Berlin. The parterre wing of the Column House had brightened up considerably since the depressing demon of sickness had fled from it. José had enjoyed the open air several times, and all the rest he required during the day now was taken in his rolling chair. He was gaining strength rapidly—began to take an interest in his toy regiment, and his faithful playmate Pirate had been permitted to pay his compliments in short visits.

José used the cup "grandmamma" had given him most religiously. With the appearance of this costly present at Schillingscourt began a season of anxious, almost solemn expectancy, for those who were aware of the secret of the children's relationship. Mercedes had just left her rooms to join

José when she caught a glance of the vanishing figure of the cup-bringer, and the baron stepped out of the atelier at the same time. Thus they had the startling incident from José's lip together.

The baron had become pale, and for an instant bent low over the delighted boy. Then he looked up and quietly remarked to Mercedes:

"The last act is drawing near. You will be released from your self-sacrificing situation sooner than we believed and hoped."

They concluded to remain quiescent and await further action on the part of the grandmother, as she was evidently moving without the knowledge of her brother, and any sign on their part might disarrange her plans.

Since that day Mercedes had not spoken with her host. She avoided him with a feeling of inexplicable fright, that caused her to tremble whenever she saw him at a distance, or fancied his eyes were upon her. She had been accustomed to ignore people whom she did not like, and she had frequently been told that even her "snubbing" was done gracefully; but she was also angry with this plain-speaking German baron, because she could not conquer him with her disdain, and because she was forced to respect him against her will; and she avoided him for fear that she would call upon herself a second humiliation.

He never approached the Column House on foot or on horseback; he always used the back portal in coming and going from his studio to the city. He kept his word. Mademoiselle von Reidt was still a visitor at the house. She held the reins of the establishment and nursed the baroness, for that lady was ill. A messenger was sent in haste for the physician sometimes more than once a day, and he generally came in anything but a hurry; and then his voice could be heard scolding the sufferer, whose cries and groans resounded through the house. Sometimes he was sent as a mediator to the baron, for he frequently marched with a twinkle in his eye to the atelier; but invariably returned as he had gone—alone—to the great amusement of the servants, who were not blind to the reasons for the "gracious mistress's fearful attacks."

In the meantime a letter had also been received from Lucille, filled with grossest impertinence for Mercedes, and demanding her daughter be delivered up to her at once. A reply was sent, saying the child would remain in the care of those who were authorized to protect her, though they should be forced to appeal to the law.

The pretty little thing who was the subject of this threatened contest romped merrily about the place, asking sometimes for "mamma," but quite contented with the affectionate care that drove away all longing for the little lady, who nearly smothered her children with caresses one moment, and scolded them the next—according to the variations of her humor.

Deborah guarded her pet day and night with untiring devotion. Thus she sat to-day with her knitting in hand, while Pauly played with her dolls and baby carriage near by under the shade trees in the garden. It was a gloriously bright morning. Pirate, who usually barked at all passers-by from the garden, had been admitted to the Column House to visit José. Everything was quiet about the atelier. The baron had gone away on horseback, and the lonely silence was only broken by the warbling of the birds, and the whispering of the leaves—an occasional vehicle rolled by, and carriage wheels appeared to halt on the other side of the wall. But Deborah took notice only of her knitting just then; she had dropped some stitches, and was bending with a provoked and perspiring face over her needles, and did not hear the portal softly open, and a figure in water-proof wrapping slip into the garden, followed by an elegantly dressed lady. In the gate-way stood a tall stylishly got-up young gentleman who glanced curiously about.

The first figure flew across the garden noiselessly until she stood at Pauly's side, lifted the little one in her arms with a whisper that caused the child to exclaim joyously as she clasped the woman's neck—"Yes, Minna—we'll go to mamma"—and before the babe's mouth could be closed Deborah had jumped up with a wild scream, and running after the woman and Pauly—who was making for the gate with all speed—called out in shrill tones:

"Jack! help! help! They are running away with Pauly!"

Then she felt herself held in a masculine clasp, and a pair of sharply clutching hands caught her by the neck and held a scented handkerchief over her mouth.

"Will you shut up, you foolish thing?" Lucille hissed. "Do you think, you people at Schillingscourt, that I am going to wait in lamb-like patience for the law to decide whether my child belongs to me or not?"

Minna had reached the portal with Pauly. Lucille released the woman and ran after her, followed by the gentleman—but it was not Deborah's penetrating cry that rang upon the air now—this time it came from the street. Between the portal and the carriage standing there, rose as if out of the earth a

woman, a large figure, with ashen face and compressed lips—her hair still waved, and her garments still moved from rapid motion. With a strong grasp she lifted the child from Minna's arms, and held it high over the head of the frightened creature. The sight caused Lucille to utter a shriek of dismay.

"Stealing children in broad daylight!" the woman exclaimed, in her full deep voice, pushing aside the would-be thief, and placing the screaming child in Deborah's arms, and barring the portal with her large figure as she turned again to face the party on the pavement. It was in the dreary hall of the Cloister House where these two women had met once before—the one sylph-like, and rustling in elegant attire, with her veil drawn closely over her face, while rich jewels sparkled upon her person in the dim light—the other, majestic notwithstanding the kitchen-apron, as she stood there, crowned with her own hair diadem, the language of a curse upon her lips. This time the little lady tore off her veil, her eyes glittered wrathily and her little foot stamped furiously upon the ground as she struggled vainly to press past the strong figure in the gate-way, crying as she clawed at it:

"Move aside, madame, this minute!"

"Do not touch me! Let me advise you," Mrs. Lucian, senior, coldly remarked, gazing scornfully at the gesticulating hands of the little creature.

"Ah! you would lay your big coarse hands upon me?" was the mocking retort. "I am not afraid of you, as you well know; and these same fingers that you do not consider worthy to touch your most sacred person have snapped contempt at you once before in a way that you will not be likely to forget in a life-time!"

"You appear to have little cause to triumph. My predictions have evidently been fulfilled." The speaker looked meaningly at the prim young gentleman who stood at the carriage-door glaring at the lady in the gate-way as if he would like to devour her piecemeal for daring to interfere with the little lady's plans.

Lucille followed her glance disdainfully.

"Bah!" she snapped, "that's only my secretary," and again she made an attempt to pass into the garden.

Deborah's continued call for help had not as yet reached the house, it seemed, as no one responded, and she feared the child might still be claimed by the mother.

"Good gracious, Forster! don't stand there like a stick! *Allons*—we must get in!" Lucille exclaimed.

At this the gentleman sprung to her assistance.

"Madame—"

"Lucian is my name, if you please; but you can not enter this garden," was the firm response, as she brushed Lucille's hand from her arm as if it were an insect.

The little lady retreated, laughing wildly. "Oh, yes, Forster, be overwhelmed with respect—this lady with a kitchen-apron on, who has planted herself in the portal, like the angel with the flaming sword at the gates of Paradise, is, indeed, Madame Lucian, the divorced wife of Major Lucian—the woman who deals in butter and milk on the Cloister estate, and who sent husband and son adrift from sheer meanness!"

Once more she approached the major's wife, saying, "*Fi donc,* madame, this is the second time you are guilty of a most infamous atrocity! But I am not surprised—what else can be expected of a woman with such a pitiful disposition—it is but natural you should prevent a mother from obtaining just possession of her child."

"If your claims are just why resort to this questionable manner of obtaining possession?"

At this moment the sound of many feet running over the gravel walks in the garden proved that Deborah's alarm had been heard, and Lucille sprung toward the carriage, and standing on the step ready to enter, she turned and made an inimitably ridiculous courtesy and cried, mockingly: "Thanks, dear mother-in law, for your meddling—you win to-day, but it will be my turn to laugh next time. Farewell, highly esteemed lady, until then."

The next moment the chagrined party were rolling away to the order of her high-pitched voice that commanded, "Forward!"

Mrs. Lucian maintained her position in the gate-way as if it required guarding until the very sound of the carriage wheels died out in the distance, then she faced the garden where Pauly was still crying in Deborah's arms for "mamma" and the big, big dolly she had promised the little one.

The servants that had gathered about the colored woman listened in surprise to her story of Pauly's abduction—they thought it rather singular that the mother should be obliged to "steal" her own child. This caused Deborah to forget prudence and silence, and Jack as well, when he arrived and learned what had taken place.

"That is a trick of the canaille," he exclaimed; "she always used that portal before she went away, in going and coming from town. She knew little Pauly generally played

about the garden there mornings, with no one to guard her but Deborah."

Donna Mercedes came flitting across the lawn, and Deborah hastened to meet her with the child. The great glowing, questioning eyes caused the negress to tremble as she related, and the face of her mistress grew pale and threatening as she listened; and when Deborah called her attention to the lady standing in the gate-way, Mercedes took Pauly from her, placed her on the ground, and led her toward the woman who had prevented the abduction.

This time she did not retreat, rather advanced a step, and Mercedes was impressed with her queenly bearing, notwithstanding the large kitchen-apron that still encircled her person, and was utterly forgotten in the excitement of the moment. Her cheeks were flushed, but her voice was hard and brusque as she remarked:

"If the child has been intrusted to your care, miss, you will have to guard it better—help may not always be at hand."

"A perfidious trick of this kind was not anticipated. I guard the children as precious treasures," Mercedes replied, with emotion.

"Are you the governess?" Mrs. Lucian queried, somewhat doubtful, while scrutinizing the lady closely.

An ironical smile curved Mercedes's lips for an instant.

"No. I am their aunt."

Mrs. Lucian retreated involuntarily.

"Ah, indeed! also a Fournier?" she said, contemptuously, and her eyes rested on the elegant lace-trimmed white morning wrapper, as if implying that that was also part and parcel of "Fournier's stage truck."

"Your pardon, madame." Mercedes hastily repudiated the relationship. "I do not belong to that family in any manner whatever. I am Mrs. de Valmaseda."

Intuitively she withheld the fact of herr elationship to Felix, in her present excitement. Such an idea seemed also foreign to the first Mrs. Lucian, who appeared eager for some information connected with the little lady who had just gone, and her lips barely formed the words of inquiry.

"And—the person in the carriage—"

"You mean Lucille Lucian, formerly Fournier?" Mercedes interposed.

The woman's eyes lighted angrily. It was evident that the hatred for this being, who had taken her son away on that eventful evening, had not grown less, but she composed herself and said, forcibly:

"I wanted to ask whether she lives separated from her husband."

Mercedes felt the blood recede to her heart. She shuddered. This mother overwhelmed with love and longing, struggling with remorse and regret that had not the faintest premonition that it was too late to atone—that she had no son to whom she could hold out her yearning arms and say: come, come back to your mother! She had asked the question harshly. She was still in the clutches of an obstinate disposition; but the blissful hope of her soul beamed in the stern face; it would not be suppressed. She trusted to have her son once more. She hoped the hatred connection had been severed.

"Well—why do you not answer me?" She drew so close to Mercedes as she spoke that she fancied she could hear that mother-heart beating stormily. "Did you not hear me? I asked whether he had separated himself from that flippant creature."

"Yes;"—Mercedes felt unutterable compassion for the woman, she hesitated in speaking the words—but they struck with fullest meaning when she added: "But not as you imagine."

A deathly pallor fell upon the eager woman, the strongly arched brows met in a deep furrow above the horror-expanded eyes.

Mercedes took her hands and drew them toward her, and sought her glance with a pitiful, tear-dimmed face, saying:

"Do you think Felix would have sent his children hither alone—that he would not have rushed to the dearly loved mother the moment she sent him that pardoning sign by his boy?"

"Dead!" groaned the woman; the next instant her hands were wrenched away, and she fell to the earth like a tree that has been felled by the last blow of an ax. The servants had dispersed when Mercedes arrived, and only Deborah remained. She hurried to assist Mercedes in lifting the prostrate woman, but she had not lost consciousness. The blow, the horror of the unexpected blow, had for the moment bereft her of strength.

She rose, and stared with tearless eyes into space. There lay shattered all the hard, soulless Wolfram tenets, the selfish elements that had been built upon their conceited infallibility, and there also lay the new-born, blissful hopes that had struggled to existence out of so many years of suppressed longing.

"I never want to see you again—not even after death!" Those were the parting words she had said to her son, and

now—now she would have removed the cold earth that covered him with her hands, and crept close to him, for one more look at the son she had trained to manhood without exhibiting any of the unfathomable mother-love buried deep down in her heart. She would like to have poured out upon his grave the treasures of that love, and caress the earth with the kisses that he had not received in his life-time—because she wanted to remain faithful to Wolfram principles.

Was she not herself to blame because his young, enthusiastic nature, that had been so cruelly denied its natural affection, had gone out to the first tender, loving heart he had found? She rose from the earth where the severe hand of retribution had hurled her, and gazed around as if she had lost her way. It was not herself clinging to the trunk of a tree, at hand, for support. There was no blood in her veins, no heart in her bosom. For what purpose a heart—now? Had she not even denied herself to him in heaven?

Mercedes lifted little Pauly and placed her in the unhappy woman's arms, saying to the child:

"Love grandmamma, dear."

Pauly had seemed a little afraid of the large woman who had suddenly fallen to the ground, but the word "grandmamma" appeared to have a charm for her, for she wound her little arms around the woman's neck, and pressed her soft face close to the pale cheek in a caressing way.

"The children are his legacy to you," Mercedes said, with deep emotion, as the woman clasped the child stormily to her breast, and the wild, tortured eyes overflowed in a passion of pent-up tears. "He bade me take his darlings to you, and ask you to protect—to be father and mother to the orphans."

The mother's intense grief was too strong for language; she merely held the son's "legacy" mutely to her heart.

"Come to the house with me, I have so much to tell you," Mercedes added again, taking her hand.

"Yes, take me to his boy."

In silence they walked toward the Column House, followed by Deborah.

"Oh, papa, papa! look over there! Aunt Teresa is in Schillingscourt!" screamed Guy, from his perch of observation in the pear-tree.

A head became visible above the hedge, and a burst of coarse laughter resounded with the words.

"What, Teresa! you over there? Have you lost all your dignity and honor? In the name of our honorable parents, come back here to me! Shame upon you, and the curse of

our family rest upon you if you do not at once return to the Cloister estate!"

"Away!" was the response, as his sister flung out her arm as if clearing the mist, and cutting a passage-way that shut him out forever. She did not even look in his direction, she did not notice that he disappeared behind the hedge, and ran like a madman to the house, nor cared for the mocking voice of the boy in the pear-tree, who shrieked over that she had left the gate open, and some one had stolen the bleaching linen from the grass.

The boy had evidently watched her, and informed his father of her movements.

Regardless of all this, with the little girl pressed closely to her breast, she followed Mercedes up the steps to the Column House. The same steps she had trodden for the last time thirty-four years ago as a bride. It did indeed seem as if she were walking over glowing iron; and when the great vestibule door opened into the well-remembered hall with its statuary and old-time recollection, she seemed rooted to the spot, and a sensation came over her as if she had left her body and merely her spirit were roaming among those memorable scenes.

Over these marble floors her white bridal-dress had trailed—"a grandly beautiful woman—a pure, proud, queen-lily had become his own"—*he* had whispered to her, on that spot near yon Ariadne; but the proud lily had chilled him with her stately coldness, because he would not become a slave to the imperious wishes of a woman who was so utterly different from himself. Then she became a mother—a proud one—but one determined to mold the precious treasure of a child's soul into the foreign nature of a Wolfram. But the usurped souls had escaped her, and she had turned away from them in wrath, and wandered alone into the desolate wilderness. The Wolfram mold had crumbled before her eyes. Her brother, the false star and evil genius she had followed blindly, had himself crushed it, for the sake of his son—and such a son!

Deborah opened wide the door leading into the great room—her mistress's apartment. Pirate, the big dog, stretched on the carpet beside his little master's rolling-chair, sprung up with furious barking at the stranger lady; but José held out his arms in delighted recognition, while Mercedes quieted Pirate, and José scolded mildly at him, and laughingly said: "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, to bark like that at my grandmamma?"

His soft tones were the same that had sounded so ill to the ears of the rough man in the Cloister House. Ah! was she

deserving of this pay—to have such a treasure placed in her keeping once more—was there yet time to turn from the past, and lavish upon the children of her son the fullness of all that had been denied him? She would care for them as the apple of her eye—these messengers of his unchanging love—even now with tears streaming from her eyes, she was being refreshed in the possession of their affection—in looking at their sweet young beauty and gentleness. Here was her place—she would return to the Cloister House once more, only to settle up her affairs there, and then never more go back to its loveless gloom. As yet she had asked no question; the distance was great, through shrub and over lawns, from the little portal to the Column House; and she placed Pauly upon the floor, and sunk exhausted upon a divan in Mercedes's favorite retreat in the window embrasure.

"Now speak!" she murmured, folding her hands and pressing them over her eyes.

Mercedes stood directly opposite, before the escritoire, above which were grouped the family pictures. Her heart beat with tender sympathy for the woman, who, when she took her hands from before her eyes, would see before her the portrait of the man she had called husband. It occurred that instant; a cry escaped her lips; she started up only to sink back again, and closed out the sight with her hand once more. Was he not long since dead to her—buried in a closely sealed corner of her heart? Yet there he was looking at her with his merry blue eyes, his handsome bearded face, with its sparkling intelligence and humor of the past. It had stolen upon her dreams in the years gone by, she had fled from it, and grasped the first implement of labor at hand in garden or kitchen, and thus found forgetfulness! But here he was in all his manly perfection, and at his side a lovely woman.

A light seemed to break upon her.

"Is that the woman's proper place? Who are you?" she asked.

"I am Mercedes Lucian—Major Lucian's daughter by a second wife."

The truth had to be spoken, though it was like a dagger thrust in a suffering heart.

Then Mercedes related all there was to be told from the time Felix was received with open arms by his father, followed by the American civil war, wherein both father and son perished, up to the present hour.

It was a bitter, bitter cup, drained drop by drop to the very dregs; and the haughty head bent lower and lower until

her face was bowed upon the desk and rested there as if all life had gone out of it. She did not lift it when sounds of confusion penetrated the house from the street, and Hanna came in excitedly relating that there were rumors of a calamity at the mines, and women were running thither in terror to look after the welfare of their husbands. The mines were flooded and ruined.

Mercedes laid her hand upon the bowed head, but the woman's voice was almost threatening, as she exclaimed:

"Let me alone! What is it to me? The man has more than enough." The words were nearly the same used by her son once, and she became so indignant! "He can stand the loss. What is such a wreck to the wreck of my lost years—the pain and sorrow I endure? Oh! will you not continue? You said my son, my poor son, received a shot in his breast while standing upon the threshold defending his home?"

"Yes, Jack rescued him, and carried him upon his back into a thicket of woods," Mercedes related, and how, with the aid of the faithful negro, they had made their way to her estate, Zamora, that the wounded man might breathe his last surrounded by his idolized family. She described how Felix longed to see his mother, and how fervently he hoped she would become reconciled and accept the trust, and be a protector to his little ones.

In the meantime the confusion upon the street had increased. Hanna, at Mercedes's request, remained in the room with the children. She crouched near José's chair and glowered at the woman in the window embrasure.

She remembered how unbending that haughty head had turned upon her father—poor, lamenting Adam—when he stood pleading for justice in the door-way of the Cloister House kitchen. Those hard-hearted people were being punished for their avarice. The wrong done her father was coming home to them—through that coal mine for which her father had been driven to his death. The wicked senator was having his gold washed away, and that cruel woman yonder was wailing for the death of her son.

Suddenly the girl's fiery eyes wandered from the stricken form to the carved panel behind the green cushioned sofa. She stole on tiptoe toward it, with glaring eyes. Lazy Pirate also lifted his head and growled as he pricked up his ears.

"Unfortunately, I can not give you the letter written by Felix," Mercedes continued, unheeding Hanna's movements. "The casket containing it and other valuable documents has strangely disappeared."

Mrs. Lucian slowly lifted her head to meet the deeply sympathizing eyes of the speaker.

"José," whispered Hanna, with an insane light and glow upon her face, "do you see the little clouds of dust coming in there? do you hear that knocking and crackling? Listen—do you hear it? You think that is some one scratching on the wood-work, don't you? but it is not! It is nothing but mice—mice—that's what they all say."

She glided nearer and nearer to the wall, and Pirate rose, and placed himself in attitude ready for a spring.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE work at the mines went steadily on, although premonitory symptoms of a possible catastrophe made themselves very evident. The senator and some of his friends lightly remarked that the "Old fellow down below was in such a hurry with his tricks!"—that were to be warded off by the clever men who were hourly expected to examine the nature of the constant water accumulation, and suggest a remedy to prevent an inundation.

It was the noon hour, and the miners' wives were on their way to the mines with their husbands' dinners, when they suddenly felt the valley quake beneath their feet, followed immediately by exclamations of horror from the direction of the mines. A few of the laborers had managed to escape, and they reported that an inundation of sudden and frightful force had taken place, and submerged the coal-pits and all therein.

The inspector, and such help as was at hand, did all that human power could to rescue the unfortunates; and the lamentations of the women resounded through the streets as they ran toward the Cloister estate, and a perfect mob gathered about the doors of the house in a short time, and the old halls re-echoed cries and threats. The maids and field-hands rushed into the house to bolt and bar the doors. They expected the enraged multitude would lay violent hands upon the master, whose meanness brought about this calamity. But the people beat upon the doors with loud curses until a bolt was drawn and the senator appeared, and with pale, anxious face demanded to know what this uproar meant. He got his reply from dozens of hoarse throats, and for once in his life the self-contained, stern man trembled. He rushed away to the mines, followed by the crowd and all his own people. Master Guy in the meantime was sliding down from his perch, and strove to drag the bleaching linen behind some bushes, after he had

hastily barred the gate, so that "Aunt Teresa would have to go around by the front way, with her kitchen apron on, when she came back. She had no business to go over to those people he and his papa detested."

But the linen was too heavy for him to hide, and so scare the life nearly out of his aunt in the belief it had been stolen, as he had falsely stated. So he gobbled up pear after pear lying in the grass, and, taking a bite out of each, threw it down again—that would provoke her anyhow.

But why was everything so quiet, he began to wonder. It was certainly dinner-time, and he had not been sent for as usual. He ran into the barn-yard and peeped into the stables and into the servants' quarters. The doors all stood carelessly ajar and no signs of the dinner that was ever ready upon the table for the field-hands at the striking of twelve. The kitchen in the house was also deserted. The soup in the kettle on the hearth had boiled down, and the smell of burning roasts came from the ovens. Guy chuckled gleefully as he piled the stove full of dried wood. Everything should be burned to a crisp. Those stupid women had no right to be away from their duties, and likely stood gossiping somewhere and neglecting their work, just because Aunt Teresa happened to be off guard for a moment. He would go and tell his papa how villainously everybody was behaving.

Guy knocked at his papa's room door. The senator had made it a rule not to be intruded upon unceremoniously, lately not even by his boy; but there was no response, so Guy tried, and found the door unlocked. The room was empty. This was a delightful discovery for the young heir. He did love to "swoop" among his papa's things and go up on the gallery and play preacher, and roar and gesticulate as if the auditorium were packed with a highly charmed assembly, and sometimes he had a chance to slip into the great closet where the organ remains and the gilded wooden angels were stored.

He bounded up the stairs. At the head he came to a sudden halt, and his intelligent eyes gleamed like those of a fox come upon an unexpected prey. Here he found that the panel had again parted arm and body of the saint. The merciless gap that bereft the kneeling woman of a blessing hand piously held above her head, was not quite as large as on a former occasion, but it was large enough to give the curious boy a chance to see if there was anything behind the panel. He noticed a bit of wood had somehow got crowded between the panel and the floor, and this had prevented the crack from closing up. Ah, ha! Master Guy had indeed made a discovery. His papa ha[illegible]

tried to make him believe the panel had opened by accident. He had examined the place where the open space had been and could find no trace of a crack; nor had it been glued, for there had been no carpenter in the house to mend it. This Master Guy knew. So he pressed his fingers into the open space now, and lo! the panel moved further apart easily and noiselessly. Guy was just a little startled, but he knew no fear; there was not a dark corner in the whole place he was not familiar with, and frequently hid in some one of them in time to bound out upon some unsuspecting passer-by for the purpose of enjoying the fright he had given them. But the gap led into a black gulf that seemed to have no end. Curiosity triumphed, however, and the light fell into the passage from the room upon some new boards. This was the partition that formed the closet where the organ had been. Nonsense! What was there here to be afraid of! But what in the world did his papa keep in there, any way?

He passed in, with his hand resting on the board partition; then he gained confidence, and directly came to a couple of steps that he fearlessly mounted, and followed the passage until he stumbled against something pliable, that moved noiselessly, like a cushioned door, at his touch; and Guy heard a woman's voice distinctly, as if she were relating a story or reading about battle-fields and desolated homes, and about some one who lay dying and longed so to see his mother. Guy did not care greatly about pathetic stories—he never had patience with nurses and servants who harped upon goody-goody stories or fairy tales—and he became impatient now, listening to this woman's voice, and wondered how this stranger got into the Cloister House, and where could she be. His face grew wickedly angry at the thought of the intruder, and he passed nearer to the sound; suddenly his hands touched wood, and his fingers rested directly upon a bolt. He had her now, and such a scare as he would give her!

He pulled the bolt back, and opened the door like a flash, and found himself before the most wonderful lattice, or network of wood, and beyond a most beautifully furnished room. All this came upon him like lightning; but just before him stood a girl with wildly expanded eyes, and at her side a monster dog, ready for a spring. He endeavored to retreat, but a shriek from the girl was followed by a crash. The dog had leaped at the frail wood-work, and torn it like so much lace, sending the splinters flying in a thousand directions. The boy fled in speechless terror, stumbled against the partly cushioned door near the two stone steps, fell, and, in falling, turned

over and rolled into the gallery and down the stairs upon the floor of the senator's room, the dog after him, who now stood over his prostrate body, as if he would tear it limb from limb.

"This is the mouse passage!" Hanna shouted triumphantly. "Oh, God of mercy be thanked! My poor, dear father's innocence is proven! The spy was in the Cloister House!"

She hastened through the passage and pulled Pirate away from the boy; but Guy did not move. His face was fearfully distorted, and he foamed at the mouth. Guy lay in spasms that were real.

The ladies, so deeply absorbed, did not notice Hanna's singular actions, until startled by her cry and the crashing of the panel, through which, they say, Pirate disappeared.

Mercedes was too amazed to move, and only stared; while Mrs. Lucian jumped up with comprehensive agitation. She realized the shameful force of the girl's exclamation: "The spy was in the Cloister House."

"Great God!" she stammered, lifting her hands to Heaven, as if there alone help could be found to obliterate this disgrace.

Yes, this passage led to the senator's private room; directly opposite the door opening upon the gallery hung the portrait of their brave father, Klaus, the best and noblest of all the Wolframs; his honest eyes were gazing into the dark passage where so much treachery had been enacted, and in which a member of his house had vilely played the spy upon an innocent neighbor. Not one of the race had ever dreamed of a secret passage between the buildings, until the present Wolfram, with his sly, treacherous character, had found one, and basely made use of it for disreputable eavesdropping.

Mrs. Lucian had as yet no conception of the extent of the catastrophe, but she saw that Guy had evidently spied upon his father in some way, and also found the passage. There he lay at the foot of the stairs, Hanna holding off the dog—Hanna, the daughter of the man who had once stood upon the threshold of the door not far away and begged for redress in vain, and in consequence of his dishonor sought relief in death.

"The boy is sick," Hanna remarked, ordering Pirate back to his own department. Somewhat humbled, the dog trotted up the steps and back to his little master's side again.

An indescribable struggle was going on in the soul of Mrs. Lucian. That brother who had dishonored their name in this foul manner was dead to her. *She* could do nothing in common between them now; he did not deserve a word from her in his defense. But he, the honest father who had gone to his eternal rest after working a lifetime to add luster, born of

honest industry, to the Wolfram name—he had a right to expect that his daughter should strive to save the name from stain. The eyes seem to appeal to her and say: "Save the reputation that has been built upon generations of *honorable actions*, the dearest treasures of our life." With hands pressed in spasmodic agony upon her bosom she passed through the dark passage, followed by Mercedes, who began to have an idea of the cause of the old lady's distress.

Silently she lifted the unconscious boy and laid him on the sofa, then she went into the kitchen, from whence the smoke and smell of burning victuals came.

Duty had become a stereotyped habit with her, and, notwithstanding the distress that bowed her soul so deeply, she mechanically removed the pots and kettles and pans with their destroyed contents from the stove and ovens, opened the windows, and then only hurried to the gate, where some of the maids were standing discussing the calamity of the mines, and sent a messenger after the physician.

Mercedes remained at the side of the lad, who continued in violent spasms. She presented a contrast, with her elegant and stylish presence, to the old-fashioned surroundings with their ancient peculiarities. She felt as if she had suddenly been carried back several centuries with the spirit of story of old.

Mrs. Lucian came in again, and with her glance resting on the portrait of Klaus Wolfram, she curtly said to Hanna:

"Do you intend to make use of this discovery?"

The girl's eyes lighted up wildly.

"To be sure I shall, Mrs. Luican! How could I hope for the light of the sun to shine for me again were I to remain silent? Though you offered me every dollar you owned, to buy my silence, you could not tempt me. Why, I would cheerfully beg from house to house, if only for the pleasure of telling people that my dear good father died innocent! He did not betray his master. Thank God! Thank God!"

The girl folded her hands fervently upon her breast with the last words.

"You are right, girl—and I have done my duty." Mrs. Lucian turned from the old portrait and went up the steps into the dark panel opening to examine the interior. Near the broken wood-work of Schillingscourt walls she stumbled against an object on the floor. She stooped and picked up a silver-bound and jewel-inlaid casket, and returned with it to the room below.

Mercedes gazed in astonishment at her for an instant, and then, in trembling accents, said:

"You can read your son's letter now. It is in your hands."

"Oh, I knew the mice from the Cloister House had carried it off," murmured Hanna, with a bitter smile. "But it's no business of mine—none at all."

The box fell from the woman's hands upon the floor, and she bowed her face like one stricken and mute with shame.

At this moment the doctor was announced, and she collected herself and said to Mercedes, in her old hard tones:

"Go to my grandchildren. I will come presently, when I am done here."

Hanna picked up the casket, at a motion from Mercedes, and followed the lady back through the cushioned passage-way into her own room. The doctor found Mrs. Lucian sitting composedly beside the sick boy. He began to talk about the calamity at the mines, from whence he had been called, but she pointed to Guy. He was startled when he saw his patient, and made a hasty examination while Mrs. Lucian informed him that the child had fallen down the gallery stairs.

The doctor pronounced the case "concussion of the brain," and ordered the father to be sent for immediately.

A "lucky star" had hovered over the house for centuries. It brought them health, wealth, and sunshine, respectability and eminence; and when the race threatened to become extinct, it glowed in the new radiance for their name, and shone upon another Wolfram, and at the same time opened also a new fountain of gold that run from the mines into the Wolfram coffers. And now that star had suddenly gone down, and dragged with it wealth and reputation, and threatened to wipe out the name as well, and leave it in eternal night.

In the Cloister House the hopes of the Wolframs hung upon a slender thread. But out in the valley an enraged populace rose in indignation against the avarice and greed of the hand that dived into the very earth to rob it of its treasure for selfish purposes. The Nemesis was closely upon his track, but, in punishing the guilty, the many innocent suffered also.

What human power could do was done for the unfortunates. The senator worked harder than all the others; but the people thought only of his past selfish brutality, and the hate that had been gathering in their hearts for years now found voice. He had scarcely recognized their polite greetings, or acknowledged them as fellow-beings, when their hats were lifted to—his money and influence. But the sarcastic smile was gone from his face now; he realized fully that he was despised, and that the name of his honest and industrious ancestry was de-

spoiled of its respect and inspiring virtue by his own selfish greed.

In the midst of this troubled consciousness the messenger arrived with news of his son's accident. The ropes he was helping to arrange for succor to the still living ones below fell from his grasp, and he stood like one entranced with horror; then he turned to hasten home.

But the multitude pressed about him, notwithstanding the lines that had been placed around the dangerous place by the police.

"Hold him!" they yelled. "He wants to run away from the horror he has caused!"

His hat was knocked off, his coat torn, and a dozen rough hands laid hold of him; he would have been mobbed had not authoritative aid been at hand. In their protection he hurried through the valley; covered with dust, excited, without coat or hat, he entered the Cloister House.

"What has happened to Guy?" he queried, vexed, yet anxious. Not a thought had he that with all his gathering misfortunes there was such a possibility as the death of his darling also looming over him. He was so quiet just now that at the first glance he seemed to be sleeping, and the senator remarked, with infinite relief, but rebuke for the doctor:

"He has had one of his usual attacks."

"An attack that is more serious than it appears," the doctor replied, without looking up from the prescription he was writing.

"How is that?" the father asked, still unconcerned.

"He has had a fall—concussion of the brain."

"Did he fall from the pear-tree?"

"No." His sister now replied from her position at the window to which she had retired when the brother entered.

He turned quickly and a diabolically victorious smile curved his lips.

"The deuce, Teresa, you here? What! I fancied some hours ago that we had parted forever, your repelling gesture was so tragic, and still you have found your way back to the Cloister House?"

"Yes, an extraordinary way," she replied, impressively, as the doctor left the room; her eyes sought his with such a threatening light that he was silenced, thinking that she had perhaps not returned in a conciliating spirit after all, but simply to take away her belongings.

"Extraordinary, no doubt," he repeated angrily; "but the question is whether I am willing to tolerate your return after

such a desertion of my house, hence I say—*not by any means*, my dearest—we are done with each other, and the way to the gable-room is closed to you. Here is the key!" He placed his hand over his breast-pocket. "If you want to know anything more, go to law about it, there I will answer you!"

The blood rushed to her head and robbed her of the last remnant of patience.

"Ah, indeed!" she exclaimed, fiercely. "You want to drive me from the Cloister estate like a beggar! You imagine I have come crawling back for my honest rights? I am here simply to ask you how you came in possession of the last letter written by my son to his mother."

He turned white, but laughed a wicked and forced laugh, as he said:

"A letter from a vagabond! Think you I would soil my fingers with such a thing?"

She suppressed the cry of motherly love and indignation that rose to her lips, and approaching him, she hissed:

"Then I am to suppose you stole the casket for its intrinsic value?"

He started back, as if the earth had opened suddenly at his feet.

She pointed to the gap in the wall on the gallery.

"That is the cause of your son's fall. He fell down those stairs, after following in his father's footsteps to the very door where you once stood and listened, like a ruffian, to the baron's private affairs. I passed through that passage of shame awhile ago with Adam's daughter. The girl is mad with triumph, and could not be induced for a kingdom to remain silent, and to-morrow the whole city will point the finger of scorn at the Cloister estate, and every one will be talking about the spy—the despicable sneak who steals his neighbor's secrets—"

"Hush! or I will strangle you with my own hands!" he cried, hoarsely, shaking his fist in his sister's face. "Think you I am to be scared by this concoction of a pack of females? May be you imagine I will take my bundle and my boy and run away from a bit of senseless gossip, and leave you and your brood in possession here? I know about that hole in the wall, but who can prove that I was ever inside of it?"

With a burst of mocking laughter he cleared the gallery stairs, unlocked the closet door where the organ had been, reached in and directly the panel gap closed noiselessly and securely, then while again locking the closet door he turned his face upon his sister with a cunning leer, showing his teeth like

a beast of prey. His movements were as agile, and his energy as unbroken, as his determination was strong to face the situation with all the intriguing of his nature and juristic knowledge.

But his glance fell upon the sofa, attracted by the renewed and violent spasms that at this instant again distorted the body and features of his son, which was accompanied by a strange whistling sound that issued from the boy's throat with every breath.

"My God, doctor, what is that?" he exclaimed, rushing down the steps in wild alarm, as the physician re-entered the room.

"I have already told you the attacks were of a serious nature, following each other so rapidly."

"You—you do not mean to tell me that my boy is in danger!"

The doctor made no reply.

"Man, don't torture me!" he shrieked, clutching the doctor's arm like a madman.

"I can give you—but little hope."

"A lie! You don't know what you are talking about! You are a bungler, and don't know anything about the case. I must have skillful men here!"

A moment later half a dozen servants were rushing in various directions to fetch doctors who could save his boy.

A few hours later, an utterly broken-down man crouched at the bedside of a young life rapidly passing away beyond all human help. With the last pulse beat of that life his own would have lost all value. What was he without this one object to strive for—this idol for whom he had ignored honor and principle in gathering gold to pile under his feet, and lift him high up above the common mass, who were to stand and worship him from this pedestal, and forget in the glittering light of mammon the evil human countenance and lamentable soul mounted above them?

He had succeeded—at the sacrifice of all that makes man noble. He stood on the top of the monument—and gazed into a grave! Of what avail now the results of his greed? The dust and molder of that darkness could not lighten up with gold!

He had offered the doctors half of his millions for his boy's life. He had beaten his breast and prayed, and cursed God in the same breath; but the boy he had once taken to his proud heart and wrapped in purple and linen, as became his infant heir, was now passing from life.

In the hour of his agony there crowded upon him memories connected with the boy's birth; he saw his wife dying. She had done her duty and given him an heir—her death was of little moment then. He thought of the grand christening reception, and the congratulation; he fancied he heard the startling sound of the organ crashing and tumbling to pieces the day after Guy's birth.

He buried his face deeper in the bedclothes that covered his dying boy; he must shut out these memories, that whispered the frightful fact that the dark cleft in the wall up there was connected with the beginning and the end of Guy's life. If that organ had not fallen to pieces, and the tempting ruins had not enticed the child to make toys of the pipes and gilded angels, he would be running out under the trees and alive with health, and he, the wretched father, would never have discovered that secret passage that had tempted him to become—a spy.

Curses, curses on the day that dawned for the destruction of the last of the Wolframs in this manner; it was all through that organ.

The night came. One doctor after another had taken leave, and only the old family physician remained. Mrs. Lucian went about, directing the household affairs. How could she desert the place while the last of their name lay dying? She was bowed with grief, and her heart seemed breaking with the burden of sorrow the day had brought her, but she made no outward sign. Message after message, fraught with misfortune, came to her house from the mines, but she permitted no one to approach her brother, who never moved from the couch of his boy, watching in vain for one conscious instant of recognition. Surely, his punishment was great.

A silence of death reigned and the night-wind moaned drearily in answer to the agonized sighs of the father, and moved the papers on the table near the open window as if some restless spirit had touched them.

The clock on the Benedictine church struck eleven. The senator started up with a cry. The slender form suddenly stretched and extended to its fullest length. The father bent his ear closely over his heart—Guy was dead.

Long the cold form was pressed to the man's breast, and the cold face covered with kisses—then he laid it back upon the pillow, closed the glazed eyes, and glided silently from the house.

"He is probably going to the mines," the doctor remarked to Mrs. Lucian. The two had been watching in the adjoining

room. "It will divert him somewhat; this is a terrible blow for him." Then the speaker also left the house, and Mrs. Lucian went into the room of death, drew the curtains down for a few moments, and remained standing by the corpse of her nephew, the boy whose short existence had been fraught with nothing but distress for those around him—to destroy and give others pain. She pressed her hand to her bosom and said to herself that she, too, had been to blame—she, who had also so fervently prayed for the continuance of the Wolfram name—and how had she not been punished in the realization of her prayers!

She put out the light and locked the door. In the kitchen the maids were sitting fast asleep, tired out with waiting and watching. She passed out without disturbing them, after taking the precaution of turning down the lamp to prevent accidents. She walked about the garden awhile, then seated herself on the bench near the hedge—for the first time in her life she knew not where to place her hand; she had been turned out by her brother, and the key to her room, where all her worldly possessions were, carried away by him in his pocket. She decided to sit there until morning, and then go to Schillingscourt to her grandchildren.

The stars shone with singular brightness above the gables and old stone walls of her childhood's home, from whence she had gone a happy bride—to which she had returned to suffer—to suffer! and all through her own fault. And what the day with its stormy circumstances had not entirely completed, the night—the hushed and solemn night perfected.

Her woman soul that had still something of rebellion in it, that glowed with jealousy when informed of her deserted husband's new-found happiness, how she for a moment hated the daughter of a happier married life, that she had granted the man she loved—loved even to-day with a passionate, undying love. The night completed the reformation. The jealousy and selfishness was all driven out of that suffering, remorseful heart.

The following morning the shocking news was carried through the town. Senator Wolfram had perished in the mines. He had appeared among the men at work seeking for their unfortunate fellow-laborers, and as suddenly vanished in the darkness below. The supposition was, he had lost his foothold and gone down—down.

The excitement was intense. Through his neglect a number of men had been hurled into eternity—strong, healthy men—husbands and fathers of families depending upon them for

protection and support. The indignation against the senator was terrible, and the fate that had overtaken him was considered a just retribution by the sufferers, and they scarcely sorrowed that he had gone to his death in such a manner on the very night his only son had been taken from him so unexpectedly. But there were a few who hinted at self-destruction.

The cause of Guy's death was not known, as yet, abroad.

There was quite a sensation at Schillingscourt. Hanna had informed the baron of what had taken place in Mercedes's apartment, and Mamselle Birkner was overjoyed to announce that Adam was entirely exonerated of the charge that had driven him insane. Such a gossiping time as there was among the superstitious servants.

Then it was not the ghost of unhappy Adam after all that had haunted the big room for years. Nothing but real flesh and blood—fingers and feet—and the supposed ghost walked the streets as proudly under the name of senator as if he were an honest man, and all the rest of them too contemptible to notice.

Surely they had a right to be incensed. And how curious they were to get a peep into the room where that "splendid dog" had made a passage-way through the panel after the ghost.

But Jack guarded the door like a statue of black marble; and his haughty mistress did not go out for her usual walk in the garden to-day. Besides the baron had visited the room for a moment to look at his destroyed panel—he might return at any moment and honor them with one of his black looks for their inquisitive curiosity.

But their amazement knew no bounds when early the next morning one of the maids from the Cloister House came to Schillingscourt, and directly returned there with Donna Mercedes and little Pauly.

Things had not turned out as Mrs. Lucian expected. She had not been permitted to go to her grandchildren for comfort and rest. With the first pink dawn she had heard the maids calling her. A messenger had come with the fearful news.

It was indeed all, all over with brother and sister. They had brought him home, the man who had striven so hard to conquer every one in attaining his selfish ends; who had even made compact with an evil genius for the purpose of advancing away beyond the slowly, honest endeavors of his forefathers.

She tottered to the house, and threw wide open the door leading into the best room, and motioned mutely for the master to be carried there. With her own hands she laid the body

of his son beside him; and then fastened the massive silver candlesticks in their brackets on the wall. Once more they should shed their light upon a Wolfram, and then never more.

Like one in a dream she moved about; her temples throbbed, and her blood ran hot and feverish through her veins; but she never paused in her labors until everything was restored to order about the house. Then she sent word to Lady Mercedes that she could not come to her to-day. She had had to keep watch with the dead.

Then there appeared to rise out of the black gulf, that had opened during this eventful night, a sweet and holy Psyche. A fair-haired little girl in white, fluttering garments came across the dark and somber threshold, led by the hand of Mercedes. The little creature hid her great frightened eyes in the folds of her auntie's skirts, just as another child, a poor little lad in blue, had done upon an eventful occasion, when first entering the cheerless house. And the woman who had scolded the little fellow—for to her seeming there could be nothing on earth more pleasing and cozy than her old home—now cast her eyes around the dark walls with a sensation akin to a feeling of repugnance. Everything had changed overnight. With the breaking of that man's influence, the old "hawk's nest" seemed to be falling into decay; the old timbers that held the ancient monastery together looked as if they could no longer support the crumbling walls—all was dark, ruin, and decay.

"My stay here is not for long," she remarked, brokenly, as she lifted the little girl and held her in passionate caressing to her heart. "My duties are almost ended."

Mercedes extended her hand impulsively. She had come in the spirit of a daughter to comfort and support, and to reject this sympathy, though Mercedes was the child of a "second choice," would have been to thrust a dagger into her heart anew. She was Felix's sister, his tender friend and nurse. She was the only one who was left who could talk to her of the dead. She would catch a little human sunshine in her old days, and step out of the shadows she had drawn around her in the cold, dreary past.

While the storm of destiny had cleared and cleansed the atmosphere of the Cloister estate, its heavy clouds still hung threateningly over Schillingscourt.

The mistress of the Column House was not improving in health. The servants also declared that Miss Riedt, who was her never-wearying attendant, had a hard time of it, with the none too amiable invalid, though she was a most patient and

uncomplaining nurse, and accepted the lamentations and scoldings of the baroness with the same indifference that she accepted her excessive graciousness after a severe attack of temper. There were times when that repentant lady almost fell on her knees before the canoness, but this only happened after the reception of letters with peculiar postmarks.

The baroness had a habit of gliding noiselessly and restlessly about the house, but never left it for the park. Only once the gardener insisted upon having seen her near the atelier late at night, flitting about until Miss Riedt came upon her, and led her back to the house under protest and angry words.

She wandered up and down under the orange-trees along the eastern terrace, constantly, however. From there she had a view of the double avenue, and the upper portion of the studio, that rose above the boscage.

She took her meals on the terrace in the company of Miss Riedt, and passed most of her time there, sometimes with a book, or some needle-work in hand, but, not to read or work, but to observe all that passed between the studio and the Column House—not a bottle of wine, not a particle of food that was carried over the gravel walk to the studio escaped her sharp glance, and surely no human being found their way to it without her knowledge. Thus she had seen her husband walking toward the house, for the first time since her return. Ah! he was conquered at last! At last he was humbled, and had come to her. But the well-known footstep did not resound near her door. Only Robert came with refreshments and related the exciting events that had taken place in the parterre rooms, and that the master had just gone in to see about it.

Then she had sent repeatedly for him to consult with her about repairs, as her interest was also at stake, and he had written a polite reply, saying that there would be nothing done until after the funeral.

He did not enter the Column House again, but he was a frequent visitor at the Cloister House. An opening had been cut through the hedge for convenient intercourse.

The baroness had witnessed this from her post of observation with intense indignation. How dare he disturb or touch stone or shrub without her consent? Was not all this her property; and here he had the audacity to stand by and see an opening made between her aristocratic domains and that low-bred element under the gable roof, inhabited so long by a man who had cheated his neighbor in the most dishonorable way! The baron must be crazy! She grasped hat and gloves to hasten to him to place an energetic veto upon this trespass of her

rights. But the canoness quietly obstructed her way, saying she would not permit her to call down upon herself the ridicule of the household by any such foolish step—the baron would not hesitate in ordering her from his premises, after what had taken place between them on their last meeting at the studio. As usual, Miss Riedt carried the day, and the baroness had to stand afar off and see Mrs. Lucian come in through the hedge-way and enter the Column House. This was intolerable!

The invalid's blood boiled with rage at the discovery thus made. Those "theater people" had succeeded in carrying out their plans. A reconciliation had taken place, notwithstanding her attempt to thwart it by her pilgrimage to Rome. They had not even missed her; not one letter of appeal for her return had she received; while she imagined he was "pouting" with her, and would eventually ask her aid for his friend's children. The difficulty had been solved, and no one had given her a thought. She could have torn her hair with mortification and vexation.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE senator and his son rested side by side, close to the earthy bed of "poor Mrs. Senator Wolfram," and the old household and farming duties were resumed with clock-work regulation. An extensive establishment like this could not be brought to a standstill with one move. Gradually it must be unwound, and it required all the native strength of the woman's character to bide patiently until she felt free to lay down the burden of care. She no longer stood actively at the dairy-table—such things were left to the maids, and all her brother's, as well as her own business affairs, were left to the baron's management. He stood by Mrs. Lucian in her unspeakable trouble, like a faithful son.

They decided to have the secret passage-way walled up.

The day after the funeral, the baron brought workmen to examine the place. Having notified Mercedes of their arrival, he found the room unoccupied, but through the partly open door he heard the children at play in the adjoining room.

"Those old monks were sly coons," the men remarked, looking with curious admiration at the beautifully carved paneling, and finding at the back of numerous finely traced vines and flowers in the wood-work little sliding panels, covering tiny loop-holes that gave the observer a full view of the extensive room. Every movement and sound had been muffled by the leather-cushioned walls and doors.

While the baron was still engaged with the workmen, the corridor door was hastily thrown open and Robert announced.

"My lady, the baroness!"

"My lady" stood upon the threshold; she was dressed in gray silk. The white lace barbe upon her head, the ends falling loosely tied under the chin, made her face appear longer and thinner than it really was. Upon her breast rested a heavy gold cross.

Her eyes swept the room at one glance. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, and the usually lusterless gray eyes had a steely glitter in them; she wanted to make an impression, that was evident. She held her head very high, and her back was as erect as if she no longer suffered with "spinal weakness."

"Ah, there you are, my friend!" she exclaimed, lightly. No one would have supposed this was their first meeting since the stormy interview in the studio. She returned the respectful greeting of the workmen with a stiff bow, and extended her finger tip gracefully toward her husband.

The baron received the lady with chilling reserve, and barely touched the slender hand.

"See there, now," she remarked, with a wicked smile, in the direction of the piano, "that is the monster that gave me such a frightful nervous attack on the very day of my return. Such a rattle-trap! Does it not look odd in my apartment, Arnold? Does it not stand there as if in mockery of my principles and tastes? Were you aware that this article of fright was to be part of the baggage brought from over the sea?"

"It would have been superfluous to make such an announcement. Besides, the splendid instrument is no 'rattle-trap,' nor does it stand in your room. You occupy the Beletage."

"I beg pardon, my friend. Thank God, with the walling-up of this villainous passage-way these mysterious noises will cease—"

"It was not the spirit of poor Adam, you see, as you declared and persisted, and that 'villainous passage-way' is the work of the pious monks, Clementine—"

"—Noises will cease," the lady reiterated, composedly, ignoring his remarks. "I occupied these rooms when we were first married, and you know I am a stickler for my rights. The light in the Beletage is too glaring for my sensitive sight, and I am obliged to roast behind drawn blinds that won't let in a particle of fresh air. Here the light is shaded pleasingly, and it was for this reason I was so anxious to consult with you at once in regard to the repairs. You will admit that I have

a right to have my say in the matter? This is what brought me down now. I am frantic to get back to my old quarters."

He smiled bitterly, and turned to follow the workmen out of the room.

"Am I to be left here alone?" she cried, without moving from the spot.

"Have you anything more to say to me? If so, be good enough to accompany me into the garden. It is hardly polite to make ourselves so much at home in other people's rooms."

"My God! I wasn't aware that I had let them out by contract. Besides, your guest will have sense enough to know that we can't give orders for repairs without coming in to see the extent of damage done on the premises."

"If you had adhered to the subject—"

"And pray, what other subject have I broached? Has my intention to occupy the rooms immediately no connection with it? However, I could not, believe me, have expressed my fervent desire for repossession had I not known that the 'mission' is at an end. A reconciliation has taken place, as I see by the daily intercourse between the Cloister people and Schillingscourt. Mrs. Lucian will naturally take charge of her grandchildren, and we shall have our rooms vacant before we know it. I hardly think Madame de Valmaseda will care to remain a moment longer than is absolutely necessary in our unassuming domicile. The lady has already suffered great inconvenience, as I see plainly, now, in sacrificing herself to comply with her brother's request, and you certainly can not expect her to stay."

"I? Surely I have neither the power nor will to trespass beyond the authority invested in me by Felix. I have no desire to influence the lady."

"Well, then we agree fully, my friend, and Madame de Valmaseda will doubtless excuse—"

At this moment the door to the adjoining room was pushed open, and Mercedes entered.

It was evident from her *négligé* appearance that she had not intended coming in, for her heavy hair, usually fastened in a net, was simply held together with a comb that gleamed like a band of gold in the dark, shining tresses, from which a stray ringlet escaped here and there upon forehead and neck.

"I have nothing to excuse," said she, inclining her stately head slightly to the mistress of Schillingscourt. "I appreciate the justice of your remarks, and understand your anxiety to see the house restored to its former quiet. But I am nevertheless forced to crave your indulgence for a few days longer.

as the physician most peremptorily forbids the removal of my little nephew until he is strong enough to endure the confusion of hotel residence without danger of a relapse."

The baroness scrutinized, from under her drooping lids, the beautiful speaker from head to foot. She had maintained the most courteous demeanor toward her husband thus far, but nothing could have changed her mood and poisoned her amiability quicker than a sight of this strikingly handsome American. Could there have been a more lovely picture than this piquant face, with its great sunny eyes, above which the wealth of hair was so negligently gathered, and below which could be seen a portion of the round tenderly curved neck?

The sight decided the lady.

"The Wolfram establishment, I should think, was, just now, all that could be desired as a quiet resort. Mrs. Lucian is the only occupant now."

The baroness said it with great innocence; the drooping eyelids were not lifted, and she added, "but it is hardly a suitable home for an elegant lady."

"That does not influence me. I would much rather go there than adapt myself to the necessity of renewing my request. I am not thinking of myself, but of my brother's children. I would be remiss in my duty did I take them into that dreary, sunless home; their happy spirits would suffer in that oppressive gloom. Their grandmother would also object."

The baron had approached the piano, and stood idly fingering some sheets of music.

"This explanation is superfluous! How can you talk of hotels, madame? The rooms here are at your command as long as you feel disposed to remain."

"Thank you, Baron Schilling," she replied; "but as I said before, it is only a matter of a few days. I am negotiating for the purchase of a villa near the city."

"You!" The music escaped his fingers, and a deep flush crimsoned his cheeks. "Why, it is not long since you were ready to sail, as it were, and now you contemplate anchoring on German soil—on German ground!"

"Yes, on German ground, sir!" was the defiant retort. "Would you like to banish me?"

"That is not a Schilling's privilege; my allusion had reference to your remarkably sudden change of mood."

"Moods change with circumstances. I have become fond of my brother's mother, his children now belong to her. Those three beings are all I have to live for and love. I have

decided to stay because I can not part from them. That is why I 'anchor on German soil,' and not because I detest it any the less. If you imagine that, you are laboring under the national German want of penetration."

She passed her hand over her brow and paused, as if shocked by her own vindictiveness; and that covertly scrutinizing gray woman's eyes were upon her, ceaselessly watchful. Composing herself with an effort, she continued, with less excitement:

"The situation and style of the villa reminds me of my desolated and destroyed birth-place. In the summer season I can readily deceive myself into the fancy that I am not on German soil. The large hot-houses supply the southern flora that surrounds the little castle, and winds itself into the very forest that surrounds the park."

"You are negotiating for the princely Trebra estate?" the baron queried in astonishment, and the "gracious lady's" eyes expanded with an expression of involuntary respect, not unmixed with annoyance.

"Yes, sir; is that anything wonderful? Did you think a lady could not make a purchase without calling to her aid counsel and protection. I assure you I know exactly what I am doing. The prince is going to Italy shortly to reside there permanently, and the agent tells me the place has but recently been put in perfect order. I can take the children there as soon as practicable."

"Why, that is a splendid arrangement," said the baroness, preparing to depart; "and pray, madame, consider this house your home in the meantime. But, my dear Arnold, in reference to your affairs, I can only say that I will not consent to your occupying those hot, close rooms above the studio any longer. The low ceilings makes the place intolerably oppressive."

"Don't be uneasy about me. My last painting goes to the Vienna Exposition to-morrow. I shall follow in a comple of days. Then I am going to Copenhagen to remain some time making new studies?"

"Good Lord! and I only heard of it this moment! How do you expect my maid to get ready at such short notice? And my traveling clothes? Really, my dear Arnold, this is most inconsiderate." She fastened the ends of the lace barbe securely under her chin, grasped her gray trail hastily, saying: "But if I hope to be ready at the proper time, I have not a moment to lose."

"Do you imagine I expect you to accompany me, when you have just said that you were suffering more than ever. A

northern climate will not improve your health—and you have not been home long."

"No matter. Under any circumstances I am going with you."

"That remains to be seen." With a deeply respectful bow to Mercedes, and closely followed by his wife, the baron left the room.

Mercedes heard them walking through the hall toward the garden. Unconscious of what she was doing, she stepped out into the corridor, and watched them walking along under the sycamores, the lady clinging lovingly to her husband's arm. Mercedes's sight became misty. She returned to her room, and in the deep embrasure of the window, tears, burning tears, welled into her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"You are feverish," remarked the baroness, as she touched his hand in passing her own through his arm, "and you are seriously angry, I see"—she clung still closer to him in speaking—"and I have in reality done nothing wrong. Have you the right to expect that I should order a faithful, self-sacrificing old friend from the house merely because you have an aversion for her?"

"I unquestionably have the right in this instance."

"Arnold, no one has suffered more than I have, in consequence of Adelaide's presence in our house, but that is done with now. A better excuse to get rid of her"—she lowered her voice to a whisper and glanced around—"could not be thought of. We are going away, and all that is needed is your decided request for me to accompany you."

"And you think I will make such a request?"

He halted in his hasty strides toward the studio, and drew his arm away from her hand.

"To be sure you will," she replied.

"I travel alone now, and in the future; and you are at liberty to do the same. My interest in your movements ceased when you went to Rome without my consent, and regardless of my feelings on the subject. I resolved then upon the stand I have now taken."

"I decline this liberty, and shall not grant it to you!"

He made no reply, but smiled peculiarly as he hastened to his studio, his wife keeping close at his side.

The conservatory door was open; the air was close within; the fountain jets were all turned off some hours before by the

baron, because their rippling disturbed him. He approached the large basin, and directly the air was cooled by a silvery spray of water. The baroness busied herself with the importance of a helpful housewife in starting the various little fountains in their marble basins nestling among the plants.

"How pretty!" she cried, with condescending affability, watching the circling sprays as they fell into the large basin. "I had no idea of this charming toy behind these glass walls, or I should have overcome my aversion to the place, and slipped in here frequently to be near to you. However, when we return I'll make up for it."

Not a feature indicated his thoughts; but rapidly turning off every one of the sprays she had opened, he remarked:

"It makes it too damp here. It was a mistake collecting such a quantity of water near my studio."

"Is there an excessive supply?"

"Enough to float my work-room in case the drains were neglected."

Pushing aside the curtain, he entered the studio, she followed him, saying: "That would be a pretty climax to cap the confusion and destruction over in the house. But apropos, my friend," she added, sinking languidly into a chair, "confess now, were not my instincts correct respecting those intruding Americans? Good honest old Schillingscourt has been subjected to strange vicissitudes lately. The flight of a ballet-dancer without paying her debts; death-inviting sickness, that attacked me also when I came home so unprepared for such changes; the almost irreparable damage to our lovely paneled room, and our own misunderstanding. All this has come upon us through these strangers! And what is the gratitude you receive for all the misery they have caused you? The barefaced insolence of this impudent cotton-princess! I hardly think you have made a conquest of this bronze-colored beauty, my friend." The speaker shook her head meditatively, and chuckled softly, wickedly. "She said some very naughty, hateful things. She was not exactly flattering you when she spoke of 'the national German want of penetration.'"

He had stepped back to the easel, and the large picture on it prevented her from seeing how his color changed from the freshness of health to deathly paleness.

The languidly reclining lady continued talking with the most smiling complacency about the "most intensely amusing" scene she had ever witnessed in the paneled room; then she suddenly started up from her indolent attitude, exclaiming: "But, mercy! here I am talking away valuable time, while

my maid is idly reading, unconscious of the mountains of work looming up before her. Seriously, Arnold, can't you postpone it just one more day?"

"Have I not said that my journey will in no way inconvenience you? How often must I tell you that I am going alone?"

"Nonsense! I am going to notify Adelaide."

He appeared suddenly from behind the easel; one glance at his stern face told her she had an inexorable antagonist to deal with.

"And I will notify Miss von Riedt *in writing* that I shall not permit you to accompany me under any circumstances! That, from henceforth into all futurity, your 'soul,' to borrow a pathetic current phrase, is left to her absolute management and protection."

She bounded from her chair as if "physical debility" and "delicate nerves" were weaknesses to which she had never been addicted.

"You will do nothing of the kind, my dear Arnold!" said she, derisively. "I have friends extending longing arms to me. Once within that embrace, you would find me—but never mind me. I would, however, remind you that in such an event all the significance attached to the Steinbruck name would be lost to you. An expensive step, you see."

"I am familiar with those excellent 'friends;' they are the ones who have been maneuvered into the belief that you were induced to forsake the holy cause, for which you were intended, by the devilish allurements of my good father, who hoped, by the 'significance attached to the Steinbruck name,' to benefit his son. They have been kept under the false impression to the present time that your piously ascetic nature would long since have followed the bent of a chaste heart, and fled from a life so repulsive to you back to the unselfish 'longing' ones, were you not forced by the 'yes' once spoken to remain at my side. I am well posted, Clementine, and can see through the treacherous being who cheats her friends by a pious seeming, and yet clings really to all that is worldly."

She sunk silently back in her chair, biting her lips excitedly. "It is only too true. My father did anxiously desire the marriage. Your apparent amiability, your prettily indited, womanly letters presented a Madonna-like disposition to his imagination. Death was approaching, as he thought, and he believed he was securing a beautiful, happy future for his son. But that son was only gazing into the tenderly fading eyes with no thought of his own future—only glad to see them

brighten once more. You were not ignorant of this, for I told you at the time without reserve."

"And this means—who knows with what object—that you never loved me?"

"Have I ever made hypocritical protestations?" he exclaimed, turning upon her sharply. "I did, at first, honestly try to harmonize our life—"

"So did I!" She rose slowly, with the important demeanor of one who held a trump card in reserve. "I can never forget the few hours I spent at Schillingscourt before our marriage; ostensibly a visitor, but really to take a look at the place. I was—why deny it?—painfully shocked to think you were obliged to bring a young wife into the tobacco-scented quarters of an old soldier. And how cheerfully I rescued you from such humiliation! In the course of a few weeks Schillingscourt became a suitable place for us. This, alas! you have forgotten."

"No! you have taken good care that I should not, or I would not have had occasion to sigh, time and again, God deliver all poor men from a rich wife!"

"Really, such an intolerable yoke can be shaken off."

"For us the difficulty will not be great, as I happen to know that the black-robed lady over in the Beletage of the Column House, your true and self-sacrificing friend, carries in her pocket a special document from Rome annulling our marriage."

"And knowing this you failed to take immediate advantage of what would be a most welcome release?" was her triumphant cry.

"Simply because I had no inclination to meddle with your monkish scheming, nor burden my conscience with the reproach of having hastened your convent imprisonment."

"Arnold!"

The appealing tones caused him to recoil with a gesture of repulsion. The action enraged her.

"Do you comprehend that when the convent closes upon me it closes also upon all the wealth that gave Baron Schilling eminence? Do you flatter yourself you would still be received by our aristocracy when you are no longer my husband, and the owner of a colossal fortune?" she queried, insultingly.

"Think you I have ever attached the slightest importance to such equivocal respect? Who are these people who condescend to receive—as in this case—her husband for the sake of the wealthy wife, and the colossal fortune? A few aristocrats, who, in deprecating the fact that riches are not divided ac

cording to their notions in these times, are yet glad to receive among their number one who constitutes a power in his wealth! They are not my world. They do not add honorable luster to my name! When I go out into the world now without you—"

"You will have neither home nor hearth to warm a welcoming return."

"You think not? The dear old Column House and its garden is mine! And that work"—pointing to the picture on the easel—"will pay the last mortgage you hold upon my home. That is all I want. Not a farthing of Steinbruck money clings to it; and, by the authority of ownership, I now request you to remove, as soon as possible, everything, not omitting the smallest nail, that belongs to you within the four walls of Schillingscourt!"

"Arnold, forgive!" she wailed.

"Go!" said he, hoarse with the agitation that shook his vigorous form. "After all the harm your vituperative tongue has done me, earth has no language to reconcile us! Go to those friends whose arms are 'longingly extended.' Let these guardians of your youth reap the fruits of their training, and extirpate the evil spirits that have poisoned my existence. They condemn the drama as a 'delusive evil,' regardless of the fact that they educate girls to enact tragedies in the homes of their future husbands."

He hastened up the winding stairs, and the baroness sunk like one utterly crushed upon the floor beside the chair.

"Dare you take such a step? Recollect that you are compromising all those who represent Schilling in that long picture-gallery," she called after him. "Not many are aware of the impoverished condition of your house; but when the Church claims my property, all the world will know that old Baron Krafft von Schilling could not call a tree, even a blade of grass in the meadows, his own."

"Then let the world know it! We alone have been the sufferers. No man on earth has lost a penny through us. There is no dishonor attached to our name."

"But the curse of ridicule will cling to it," she exclaimed, rising. She fancied his voice was less resolute, less firm in bearing, and gained confidence.

"Arnold, let this be our last quarrel!" She approached him hastily with outstretched hands. "I promise never to mention this hateful subject again, never. Take me back!"

"No! I will not drag out a depressing, sunless existence with you."

"But I shall not release you! I will not move from your side! The place is mine—mine!" was her desperate cry. "Arnold, I will humble myself before all the world and confess that I begged you to tolerate me as your wife. What more can you ask?"

He looked at her with a shudder of repulsion. "Do not compel me to utter the word that has trembled on my tongue so long."

"Speak! it can not intimidate me."

"The word *hate*, everlasting, insuperable hate!" he replied, hurrying up the stairs to lock himself into his room.

Like a being tottering from a blow she clutched at the baluster.

"Hate, hate!" she muttered; "yes, the word has cut the cord. So be it! so be it!" she laughed, wildly. "But time will show the wretch his mistake! He will see when it is too late. Then he will realize to the full what it is to suffer, when he has been hurled from the pinnacle of eminence. Let him enjoy his triumph until that hour. Oh, that will hurt and humble! Oh, if I could only die!"

Collecting her strength she lifted her bowed form and stared wildly about; the echo of that awful, that decisive word ringing in her ears, and resounding from every crevice and corner, as if mocking her presence there. With tottering steps she approached the curtain, drew it aside, and entered the conservatory.

The sunlight penetrated the network of foliage and caught the fountain's spray as it fell, turning the tiny drops into millions of golden beads, that rippled upon the waters of the basin. There was a striking monotony in this perpetual murmuring, in the midst of the horticultural silence, and close to the scene of human tumult and passion just ended between those two unhappy beings.

She stared at the restless element that was quivering in its marble limits. What if its drains were closed? She saw the picture—the water rise higher, higher, as if some object were lifting a silvery veil; she saw it unfold and spread, saw it fall over the edge of the basin and creep silently toward that curtain like some silvery train. Hi, ho! how that mosaic floor began to gleam and have life! Great sheets of paper covered with drawings, and those detested faces stretched on their canvas mountings, were rocking themselves upon that silvery train. Those panther and bear rugs rose upon it as if they were undulating with life once more. Marble fragments, pedestals, cabinets, vases, even the furniture, began to float and

crash as if torn from their footing by rude hands, and the beautiful cups and goblets, and all those antique treasures—Ha! a shriek of exultation was suppressed, and with a determined face, the tall, bent figure hastened away, the rustling of her train mingling with the sound that came hissing from her lips again and again, "Hate! hate!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHORTLY after, the Beletage was in a state of confusion; servants running hither and yon. All her ladyship's trunks were in demand, and the canoness stood by, directing their packing. Her face was in a glow, and her dark eyes glittered strangely; but there was no nervousness apparent in her directions; her orders were clear and to the point.

It was, however, remarkable that all the silver-ware, every particle of household linen, and books, pictures, and ornaments were stowed into trunks also. This looked as if the lady contemplated a long absence; and still more peculiar, Miss von Riedt had sent for her ladyship's attorney in great haste, and gossiping Robert suggested that the mistress probably required an immediate and large sum of money.

Mamselle Birkner told Hanna about it, and thus the news was carried to Mercedes. The baroness was going to accompany her husband after all, Mercedes thought, notwithstanding her contempt for his profession and labors. She had a horror of the painting that was to be exhibited, and yet persisted obstinately in going with the man whose creation it was, even while boiling with inward rage in witnessing his fame and the success of his master creation. A few weeks ago Mercedes would have felt some satisfaction in seeing the Nemesis that followed the artist in revenge for his mercenary marriage; but to-day she experienced a sensation of acute regret, and fretted at the blind fate that chained a noble, manly soul to a narrow-minded, mean-spirited woman. She did not, nor had she any desire, to see him again. She was afraid of those honest blue eyes; she could not meet that searching gaze with dignified composure.

But she must see his pet work once more—that aged Huguenot woman—before it was imprisoned in its dark case, on its way to triumphant light.

It had grown dark. The setting sun had long since vanished behind the mountains, but the pale moonlight shone full upon the scene, reflecting a silvery sheen from the white exterior of the Column House, lighting up garden and fields, and

setting the little rivulets to dancing like so many diamond-decked elves, and encompassing the atelier with its pale radiance.

Donna Mercedes passed swiftly through the boscage and over the lawn, her footfalls muffled by the soft grass. Hanna had mentioned that the baron had gone out riding—nothing unusual on bright, moonlight evenings, and the baroness had locked herself in her room, to be away from the noise of packing. The gardener had gone to a neighboring beer saloon, and all was quiet about the grounds, and Mercedes hoped to escape observation, though she started like a culprit at the least sound. As she neared the studio she was startled by the sound of rushing waters, and hurried forward in self-forgetting speed.

The moonlight illuminated the windows of the conservatory, and she could have sketched every fern and leaf outlined against the panes; but she noticed also that the fountains were all turned on in full force. Like waterfalls, the basins were overflowing, and the sprays shot up their sparkling bodies among the plants with a force that seemed to become stronger each instant. She looked on in affright for a moment, then tried to enter the glass door, but found it locked. The drain-pipes were evidently stopped up. The floor was already flooded, and some of the pot-plants were overturning.

The door to the studio was open and the curtains drawn back; there was no dividing door-sill between the mosaic floor and the conservatory; but along the walls of that mosaic floor stood innumerable half-finished paintings, sketches, and valuable bric-à-brac—they would be ruined if the water reached them.

She rushed to the other door; that was also locked; but the one leading to the second story was partly open. She flew up the stairs, and paused an instant on the moonlighted landing, then opened the door and entered Baron Schilling's anteroom. The baroness was right, the air was close, depressingly close, in this low-ceilinged place to which the master of Schillingscourt had banished himself for the sake of the scruples of his dead friend's sister, who declined living under the same roof with him.

Mercedes hastily drew aside the Gobelin curtain between the studio and the artist's chambers, and stepped upon the gallery.

The moon beamed into the spacious quadrangle apartment below, with its color-glowing surroundings, looking so different in its present pale light to the picture it had presented in the gold-reflecting gleams of the afternoon sun.

The conservatory, with its wealth of floral green, seen from

this point through the glass partition, looked like some blossoming island in its watery bed. The dripping, rippling noise of the unfettered fountains resounded strong and distinct, and the flood came rolling wave-like into the studio.

Mercedes saw this at the first glance, and was in the act of rushing down the winding stairs, when a partly suppressed but exulting laugh rang through the studio. Notwithstanding her fearless nature, Mercedes recoiled with a feeling of terror. Was it the voice of a child, or the laugh of a maniac?

She leaned over the baluster and looked around. Not a living creature was to be seen; but at the foot of the stairs lay huddled some dark object—a lifeless bundle it looked like—until a wave spread nearer and nearer, and suddenly the thing jumped up out of the shadow into the bright moonlight—it was the mistress of Schillingscourt. She had crouched there, watching the creeping waters, and now moved with excited haste along the walls, upsetting the pictures, dashing down sketch-books, portfolios, everything was hurled upon the floor, until she came to the table upon which the knife lay that had sundered the canvas with its Madonna head from its frame.

The destroying blade gleamed in the moonlight in her upraised hand. She was regardless of the hair streaming over neck and back, but made an attempt to save her trailing dress from the water that began to soak her feet.

One moment she stood thus, looking at the picture that was to be sent abroad on the morrow, and muttered, "Down over the face and into the shameless breast—then he will know what hate means, and what it can do!"

Mercedes glided down the stairs, and came up behind her noiselessly, just as the tall, slender figure with a serpentine movement made a dash at the pathetic face of the little maiden beside that aged matron. But the destroying arm was suddenly wrenched back and held fast.

Mercedes, however, had underestimated her antagonist, nor calculated upon the absolutely masculine strength of this delicately nerved, frail creature, with her languid seeming. To be sure she was startled out of her wits for an instant, when she found herself in the embrace of a pair of soft, but strong arms; but she uttered a loud, shrill laugh, when she saw the girlish face behind her.

"Ah, the plantation princess! And what brings you to the private apartment of a married man, chaste donna?"

With a quick wrench she thought to escape her enemy's grasp, and succeeded in freeing one arm, and like a madwoman made a dash at the picture again with the knife.

Mercedes endeavored to wrest it from her, but failed. She felt the blood trickling along her arm from a cut her hand had received in the struggle; growing desperate, she began to cry for help, until her ringing voice re-echoed through the building.

"Let me go!" the baroness groaned fiercely, as people began to rattle at the doors for admittance; but Mercedes held fast, with all her now exhausted strength, and continued calling for help, in dread lest the miserable woman might succeed in destroying the picture at one blow with her free hand.

"Here, help! here, in here!" she cried, until at last the Gobelin curtain was dashed aside and relief came.

The stable-boy was the first to clear the stairs, and closely following came Mrs. Lucian.

"Take the knife from her—she would destroy the picture!" Mercedes exclaimed, but the baroness flung the weapon from her, and, almost fainting, Mercedes now released her hold upon the lady, and with a presence of mind stronger than her fright she endeavored to shield the lady's conduct from the knowledge of the servants, by saying to the boy—"The baroness is ill—she has a violent fever—go and inform Miss Riedt—"

"The baron has returned," said Mrs. Lucian, with a comprehensive glance at the picture, then at the baroness, who slipped by her just then with the intention of making her escape by the winding stairs, but sunk down at the foot of it with a shriek such as frequently resounded throughout the Column House, when Mrs. Lucian added: "He will probably be here in a moment, as he saw us running this way."

Mercedes looked at the shrieking baroness, but Mrs. Lucian remarked, contemptuously, "Humbug! all acting!"

Mercedes wet her handkerchief and bound it about her wounded fingers, just as the baron stepped out upon the gallery.

"What is the matter here?" was his astonished exclamation.

"Some wretch has stopped up the drains," the stable-boy called out from the conservatory, where he was wading about the fountains, shutting off the water, and removing the stoppers to the drain-pipes.

The baron hastened down the steps, and his foot touched the fainting form lying at the foot of them.

He stooped to feel her pulse, and laid his hand upon her temple—then turned away as if his doubts were verified.

Was it the moonlight, or some violent emotion that had robbed his face of all color?—it was like death. He seemed to be oblivious of the precious treasures—embodying many hours of thought and toil that were scattered about in a reckless

ruin. He passed by Mrs. Lucian unnoticing—he only looked with anxiously questioning eyes at the white figure withdrawing behind the easel, while covering the blood-stains on her dress with its folds, and striving to present a calm exterior.

"The misfortunes at the Cloister House seem to be contagious—they have spread to Schillingscourt," Mrs. Lucian remarked, adding in explanation, "I was just going as usual, to see my grandchildren to bed, when I heard calls for help, and seeing the boy running this way I hurried after him. It is something shocking to see two women wrestling, as if for life—that is what I saw here"—she turned with a frown toward the stairway where a decided rustling of silk garments betrayed life. "I can't imagine what ails your wife, baron? This dear young lady here says she is sick—she must be right, for none but an insane person, or a case-hardened sinner, cuts and slashes around with a knife—here it is," she scolded, touching it with her foot—"at a harmless painting."

"Thank God! it is not damaged!" exclaimed Mercedes in tenderly trembling accents, unconsciously speaking as if the rescued object were the dearest thing on earth to her.

A sudden ray of glory, a flash of light came into the deep blue eyes of the man. He could scarcely believe his senses, the thrillingly heart-felt words moved him strangely. He took her hand with a mute pressure, the hand that had defended his work—an emanation of his soul—with a reckless forgetfulness of self, possible only for a woman who loves!

She snatched her hand away. "It is nothing—a trifling scratch—and pray don't magnify it into a matter of life and death," she remarked coldly, with a light laugh, as if speaking willfully rude for the purpose of punishing the treacherous emotions of a moment ago. "There is nothing extraordinary in checking a dangerously delirious person; but we are wasting time, while your books and pictures are absorbing ruin—and the lady yonder ought to be taken to the house."

Mrs. Lucian had approached the baroness and spoke to her, but she received no reply.

"Do not trouble yourself," said the baron, "I will go after Miss Riedt, her attendant; she is the only one who understands these attacks."

He hastened away, and Mrs. Lucian said to Mercedes, solicitously: "You must go and change your clothes; it worries me to think of your wet feet and your wounded hand. Send for the doctor and have it dressed at once. Don't be at all uneasy; the painting is safe, while I am here as sentinel."

Mercedes left the place, but paused for a moment in the

shadowy arch of the door-way, waiting for the heavy footsteps that were becoming faint along the avenue to die out in the distance, then she hurried toward the house by the hedge pathway to avoid being seen by any one again that evening. In the vicinity of the Column House she saw the baron returning, accompanied by the canoness and a gentleman. The lady walked as haughtily erect as ever, and carried a number of shawls and medicine flasks, characteristic of a conscientious nurse.

An hour later the carriage drove to the door, and the baroness, closely veiled, leaning upon the arm of her attorney and supported by the canoness, came down the steps, and was driven to the depot in time to catch the last train that night.

Everything was silent. The canoness had issued a manifesto that none of the servants were to be visible, and consequently only a few curiously wondering eyes followed the gray train on its departure along the columned hall. They knew their severe mistress was going, to return no more.

There had been a stormy scene enacted in the atelier. The wrangling had resounded through the garden in the silence of the night. The high, shrill tones of feminine reproaches, that at times almost became imprecations, were mingled with the calmly sonorous words that fell on the air like mallet strokes. Then the atelier door was banged shut until the walls trembled, and a phantom-like gray figure flitted along the sycamore avenue as if it were an evil spirit driven from a long maintained stronghold by conquering right.

The ancient pines behind the studio might well groan and shake their heads, for this was the first time such a distressing parting had been witnessed by them upon Schilling soil. There had been some overbearing old fellows among the Schilling husbands, and some of the wives had maintained an intellectual as well as physical equality, yet wearing the woman's scepter with dignity, for the husband would have a lord and master's supremacy, no matter how valuable the worldly goods she brought him, nor what her name and rank. Though those masculine tyrants roared and stormed ever so fiercely, the old trees never could have told of such cuttingly vituperative language as fell from the tongue of woman that night in the atelier.

The following day the baron held a long consultation with her "ladyship's" steward and Mamselle Birkner, who were instructed to take charge of all that had once belonged to the mistress of Schillingscourt, to be forwarded to that lady.

Luckily for Mercedes, Mrs. Lucian happened to be with her

grandchildren, and present, when late in the afternoon Baron Schilling was announced by Jack.

She trembled and retreated to the window, bereft of all composure, when he entered.

The carriage was in waiting, and he was dressed for his journey.

"I have come to place my home once more at the disposal of Madame de Valmaseda and Lucian's children," said he to Mrs. Lucian, politely declining the chair she offered him. "My excellent Birkner and Hanna will do their best to make the place as home-like and comfortable as possible after other people's property has been taken away."

How strangely severe the words sounded, accompanied by such a beaming face.

"I must go abroad. I have the depressing consciousness that I have become a savage, in a prolonged warfare with mentally degenerating influences; until these distorting impressions are worn off I shall not return."

He walked to the window and took Mercedes's hand tenderly between his own beautiful, strong, white ones. All anger and resentment had gone from those bright, blue eyes, and there glowed the fire that had flashed in them for one moment on the previous day.

"Forgive," he whispered; "the uncouth German has been a sad bungler in reading human souls. He will do penance by a long and lonely pilgrimage."

He pressed his lips softly, gently, upon the wounded hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Trebra Villa, a princely estate, was situated in the suburbs of the city. A much frequented drive, bordered by favorite promenades, ran by the park, in the depth of which a peaceful quiet reigned. The timid golden pheasant inhabited the thicket; deer grazed fearlessly upon the lawns, while a cooling breeze was always wafted from out the densely interwoven foliage of the woodland shades, where, in the moist deep the giant ferns thrived, and where ivy and vines would soon have obliterated all trace of footpaths had not the pruning human hand been constantly at work.

These paths wound their serpentine way along some distance before they led upon signs of human life, although an occasional rustic pavilion could be seen, but the only living thing about it was the shining lizard moving among the vines

overgrowing the roof, or the twittering bird that, for a moment, lighted upon the stone seat in front of it, in its experimental flight from the parent nest. Eventually there gleamed through the terminating thicket a marble bust, or a group of figures, that lured you onward until the ascent opened upon a line of marble columns that were ranged like some giant harp, hovering above the dark-green forest.

It was this peculiar aspect that reminded Mercedes of her southern home.

Away across the ocean the blackened, marble ruin lay hidden by weeds and creepers that had been shaken off from the trees to infold in their grasping toils this fallen work of man. Here also the million spiral creepers reached out their green feelers, threatening to intwine the whitely gleaming building; but the training hand guarded each climbing rose and willful vine from trespass. And so they wandered over terrace walls and railing, leaving an occasional gold gleaming spot of trellis exposed, and falling like a flowery pink and white cascade from terrace to terrace.

Since this had been occupied by the "American lady" many a curious pedestrian had wandered through the woods simply for a glimpse of the beautiful woman who could be seen among the flowers in her park, or coming down the terrace steps to mount her horse and gallop away.

It was nearly three years since Mercedes had purchased the estate, and still the novelty of her foreign appearance had not ceased to attract, and her fabulous riches continued to be a subject of conversation and wonderment; curiosity was probably enhanced by her mysteriously retiring mode of life, that seemed to crave no society but Mrs. Lucian's and her brother's pretty children.

True to her word, Mrs. Lucian left the Cloister House as soon as duty permitted. No will having been found, she was the sole inheritor of the Wolfram possessions. Some months after the accident she sold the estate, and made her home at Villa Valmaseda.

Tears trembled in her eyes when she bade farewell to the old place. The new owner contemplated tearing the tottering monastery down, and she heard the creaking of the little rattling portal with sorrowful emotion as she passed out for the last time. The clattering noise was associated with every eventful act of her life—confirmation, marriage, her return, the flight of her disowned son, and her brother's last unfortunate exit.

It was a sad parting, but to Mercedes's quiet joy, she noticed

that the deep melancholy gradually passed from Mrs. Lucian's face, her manner became less brusque, and her eyes beamed with dawning content and happiness when surrounded by her lovely grandchildren, or watching them at play with faithful old Pirate.

As in days gone by, when constant occupation had aided her in forgetting many a soul-harrowing hour, she sought employment, and notwithstanding Mercedes's protest and appeals to rest after her long life of industry, she superintended the household affairs, and found respect and obedience from the servants, who were subject to the strict but considerate discipline of her domestic scepter, and the regard she had once disdained in a spirit of arrogance she now accepted as a soul-refreshing need to her so long desolated heart.

Mercedes treated her with the affectionate tenderness of a daughter, and out in the world there roved a being who had played on the parterre of Schillingscourt with her boy and remained his faithful friend unto death. She had learned to love him as if he were a brother to him sleeping in the cold earth away beyond the sea.

Baron Schilling had sojourned in Scandinavia the past two years. It seemed impossible for him to inhale German air while the chains that bound two beings in a wretched union were still unbroken. All that hate and a revengeful nature could devise was done by the baroness during these distressing negotiations. She made every effort in her power to keep Schillingscourt, and was strongly supported in various ways in her laudable attempt to restore the "usurped property to its rightful owners, the Church." But she did not succeed. The baron held receipts for enormous sums paid on the mortgaged property, and these were the strongholds that restored and redeemed the Schilling homestead from Steinbruck claims and frustrated ecclesiastical connivance.

At last the bitter contest was ended, and he was free! A note from the convent informed him "that the soul, led astray by selfish and evil influences, had returned to its sacredly peaceful retreat, to look no more upon the sinful enticements of the world."

Her holy mission accomplished, the "lamb" and all its worldly goods led back to its "real home," Miss Von Riedt entered upon the reward she had earned.

The day the baroness took the consecrating veil the canoness also became a nun, and saw hovering over her, in the near future, an abbess's glory, grown out of her fanatical fidelity.

Baron Schilling began a correspondence with Mrs. Lucian as

soon as he went away; he was anxious to keep the connecting link with home unbroken during his wanderings abroad; he had written, and the old lady had been quite prompt at first in answering his letters, but household interests, or some trifling indisposition of one of the children, caused the postponement of replying for days, sometimes until Mercedes was induced to take up the correspondence; and strange to say, the good old lady appeared to be oblivious to the fact that the letters from Sweden and Norway were not handed her for general perusal as at first, but a page turned down, and only such things as "might be of interest" pointed out; and after awhile the good old soul didn't get to see the letters any more at all—had to content herself with such blushing and stammering information as the young lady felt in duty bound to communicate to grandmamma.

In the meantime the baron had gathered fresh laurels. The painting that had been imperiled by a woman's revengeful spirit had created quite a furore; and—so the report said—was purchased by a New York nabob for a most exorbitant price. He wrote that he was industriously engaged in collecting motive ideas to bring home with him.

But, alas! just at this time the Franco-Prussian war broke out, and some weeks passed without a word from the wanderer. Then a letter arrived from France, stating that German patriotism had driven him upon the enemy's heels, and there was no such thing as home for him as long as his country was in arms.

Since that time a dark cloud enveloped Villa Valmaseda. Mercedes only smiled when a crumpled letter or a hastily penciled card arrived. But when news of a battle came she mounted her horse, and chased through wind and weather into the solitude of the woods, and after an absence of hours returned with dripping habit and a worn and jaded horse. She suffered tortures during these times of anxious uncertainty, but not by a word did her proud woman's heart betray its agony.

But this season of suffering was also at an end. Peace was declared, and hearts blossomed anew with relief. The joyous news came with the glowing spring-time, and all nature vibrated in jubilant sympathy.

The sky above Villa Valmaseda was also bright and blue again. It was the fairest season of all the year. The birds sung in the park, and the May breezes caressed the tender young foliage, and kissed the climbing rose-trees into a million budding blushes, and the house stood in a halo of light and

color. The inmates passed each other with beaming faces; the whole atmosphere was permeated with something akin to hopeful expectation, notwithstanding the shadow that had crept in, with a painful contrast to the new-born glory.

Mercedes had received a letter from St. Petersburg. Lucille had written—after a silence of three years—that in consequence of a cold she had, strange to say, "been annoyed by a stupidly abominable hemorrhage of the lungs," and the doctor had insisted that she must give up her successful engagement—only for a few weeks, of course—in Russia, and recuperate in a milder climate; hence she had decided to pass a forced vacation, "on this occasion," with her children, but, being short of funds just then, Mercedes might send enough to make a few purchases before starting on her journey.

She had arrived, but "*so* fatigued from that wearisome journey," that she had to be carried to her room. At sight of this little mortal, hovering at the verge of the grave, Mrs. Lucian conquered the grief for her son, aroused anew by his widow's presence—as well as the absolute aversion she had for her. Mercedes was also unremitting in her care for her brother's bequest. All allusion to the past was studiously avoided by them, but Lucille chatted constantly about her brilliant public career—the "idol of the whole civilized world"—her conquests and success, in the pitifully firm conviction that she would shortly be able to leave the "intolerably tiresome villa, situated in such a remote corner of creation that one couldn't scare enough interesting people together to make a tea-party."

It was a glorious June morning. Lucille had been carried out upon the second terrace, away from the draughts—for the little feet that had balanced the dainty butterfly figure before an applauding multitude for three years, now refused to support the frail child-like form even for two steps. A canvas was erected above her couch to protect her from the glaring sunlight. A coquettish mortal to the last, she lay there wrapped in lace and satin, her beauty defying the very ravages of death.

"I don't know, but it seems to me," she whimpered, irritably stirring her cup of chocolate, "that the cook takes infinite delight in treating me to homeopathic doses. I can't drink this miserable slop, and insist upon having coffee hereafter!"

"But coffee has been strictly prohibited," Mrs. Lucian, senior, to whom this complaint was addressed, quietly remarked.

"Oh, yes—prohibited!" the little woman retorted, mimick-

ing her mother-in-law's tones, the fire of the old hatred lighting up her eyes. "Here in this pitiful house that word is constantly and invariably dinned at me by old and young. I've got enough, more than enough of it! Enough to disgust me! And your doctors—Heaven have mercy on the blockheads—it is hard to tell which one is the biggest—don't know enough even to cure a cold, and make such a serious fuss about it, a body might think it was going to rob me of my life—my young—my glorious—much to be envied life! Bah! Simpletons! And do, pray," she added, feebly and excitedly, as Mrs. Lucian was about to leave her, "do me one little favor, and close that terrace door to Mercedes's room, and draw the curtains to, for all of me!"

She had a full view of the interior of a beautiful parterre apartment, on the wall of which hung a startlingly realistic painting.

"I was terrified often enough with that abominable Huguenot scene while it stood on the easel in Baron Schilling's studio, without having it forever looming up like some inevitable fate before my eyes here. Mercedes must be crazy to spoil her otherwise tolerably decent room with such frightful pictures!"

She plucked a handful of the trailing roses within her reach on the terrace lattice, and picked them to pieces, scattering the leaves over her blue silk coverlet, then lifting herself to a half-reclining position she cast a shower of the white leaves over her head, until they rested like snow-flakes upon the beautiful and carefully dressed curls.

Not a trace of the indignation that filled Mrs. Lucian's heart at this childish conduct was visible in her face; she conquered the contempt she felt for the dying woman, in recollecting the children to whom she had given life.

"I want Pauly here," she grumbled, discontentedly.

"Deborah has taken her out walking, so you will have to wait a little while, but José will be here directly."

At this moment three equestrian figures came riding up through the park road-way, in the full enjoyment of their morning exercise. It was Mercedes, José, and the latter's tutor. The lad sat his pony a picture of health and beauty, and Mrs. Lucian's face beamed with happy pride, as the little fellow lifted and waved his hat gallantly when he saw her.

"Why, the silly youngster is really trying to play the gentleman," the peevish voice under the awning grumbled. "But that's your own fault, madame. The idea of letting an eight-year-old child manage a horse—"

"He is ten years old."

"My goodness! Are you forever telling me that to make me feel ancient? You can't, that's all there is about it! I am young and girlish, though a precocious youngster ten times as tall stood beside me and called me mamma! And in a few weeks I shall be in Berlin again, in spite of your countrified notions and the scientific prognostications of your wise doctors! Think you I can't succeed?"

Mrs. Lucian silently shrugged her shoulders, and the sick woman plucked yet a few roses with her tremblingly weak hands, and placed them on her bosom and in her hair.

"Just see how coquettishly my lady Mercedes rides," she continued. "What a pity the profound respect of that timid young tutor prevents him from observing it. If she knew how extremely unbecoming that blue habit is—bah! she never had any taste! And she persists in doing her sallow complexion up in it, day in, day out, until it is almost as threadbare as an office coat. But economy and simplicity is her hobby just now. I'd like to know what for? For Heaven's sake! does she contemplate turning nun like that odious baroness?"

Mrs. Lucian hastened down the terrace steps to meet the equestrians, and taking a letter from her pocket she waved it joyously toward Mercedes, who, at the sight, touched her horse lightly and galloped away from her companions. Her face was in a glow as she took the letter, opened it, and hastily glanced over the first lines, then bending toward Mrs. Lucian she whispered, in tones made uncertain with happy emotion:

"Baron Schilling will be with us this evening."

The hands of the two women met for an instant in a mute clasp of comprehensive sympathy, but their glance spoke volumes. Then, with a friendly nod to the cross little lady on the terrace, she turned her horse into the road leading to the city and gave him the lines for speed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE intelligent animal knew where to carry his mistress; he had borne her over the same ground daily for a long while; along the broad highway, by the railroad depot, into the busy street, and then through a quiet cathedral square, turning eventually into the long narrow street where the familiar gateway opened to the knowing creature's whinny of horse-joy at arriving on the spot where he was received with such excellent care, and the petting of a favorite.

As usual, at this hour, when Donna Mercedes was expected, the gate-way was opened hospitably wide, and with peculiarly

beating heart the lady rode into the shady twilight of the pines. To-day was probably the last time that she would be here alone, as she had been every day for three years. Hereafter—

The groom approached to help her to alight. His face was in a broad grin, and he endeavored to disguise the conscious *something* beaming in his honest face.

"Ah, you know the news?" Mercedes queried.

"Yes, my lady, and we are all wild with joy over it. Schillingscourt has had a long, lonesome time of it without the master. It's awful to think of!"

He led the horse to the stable, and Mercedes remained standing in front of the atelier and scanned her surroundings as far as the eye could trace.

Would he be satisfied with the changes? The old, dilapidated Cloister gable was gone, and above the trees, some distance from the site of the old house, rose a handsome slate roof.

In selling the old place, Mrs. Lucian had disposed of it considerably below its absolute value, on the condition that the new owner agree not to build on the same location, nor within a certain radius of the wall that once connected these two buildings with the disreputable passage-way that brought disgrace upon a race who had been above reproach for centuries. The strip of land upon which the monastery had stood, after some bargaining, became the property of Baron Schilling, who removed the somber-looking stone wall and replaced it with a graceful fence, in keeping with the elegant house and grounds of Schillingscourt; and the Column House stood, in all its Italian beauty, more imposing than ever beneath the gray-blue sky of its German home. The bristling old hedge no longer troubled the picturesque-loving eye; the estates were now divided by a pleasing palisade. All these improvements had been made under Mercedes's supervision. Baron Schilling had transmitted his ideas and intentions to her by letter, and she had carried them out faithfully.

The portrait that a doting father had sent over the sea to win German hearts had, indeed, been exquisitely beautiful, and the woman who came to Schillingscourt in mourning robes three years ago had also startled the eye with her loveliness. But her chilling reserve and haughty bearing, the great, imperious eyes that looked upon humanity so disdainfully, had caused people to stand coldly aloof. But to-day, with her riding-habit thrown over her arm, and hat pressed down over her eyes, the once somewhat sallow, southern complexion in a

fresh northern glow, Mercedes was an indescribably attractive being as she viewed the scene with tender solicitude. Would *he* be pleased?

He wanted a cozy, home atmosphere about him. He wanted to find a *home* welcome! He was right. He was ever right.

Well, all that expensive lace had vanished from those second-story windows. It had been sent to Coblentz to be auctioned off with all the rest of the "Steinbruck" stuff. Every trifling thing that good Mamselle Birkner could not conscientiously call Schilling property—every stray bit of down, every little medicine-vial—had been religiously recorded and sent away.

The drawings for the new furniture were the baron's own conception, and he sent them to his "trusty Birkner"—but she would not move a step toward ordering anything without Mercedes's advice and sanction.

The great arched windows were now draped with damask that fell from its rings in soft, warm-colored folds, and the general aspect of the interior now began to be suggestive of its Venetian exterior, and partook of the character of the beautiful architecture. It would not be difficult to fancy that a proud daughter of Venice might step out from behind the folds of that drapery.

Perfect silence reigned. Mercedes wandered about the garden and park gathering a bouquet of simple wild flowers; how daintily she grouped them—here a buttercup and a wild rose, there a tiny spray of lilies of the valley and a sweet little blue forget-me-not, that grew on the edge of the water, and these encircled with feathery grasses, until a most artistic bouquet was formed of nothing but wild flowers. Who would have believed that the haughty cotton princess would ever stoop to a common field-blossom? she who did not deign to give these humble children of nature one glance awhile back. And was this the despised German air that she stopped occasionally to inhale with a long inspiration, as if its gloriously invigorating fragrance had ever been the very life-giving element of her existence?

Her bouquet was finished, and she returned to the atelier and tried to enter by the conservatory door. It was locked. She then, as she was in the habit of doing, entered the studio by the stairway.

In this same little room, to which she had, by her presence in the Column House, banished the baron, she had passed many hours. She had answered all his letters on that little table over there by the window, and Mamselle Birkner or

Hanna invariably had some refreshment awaiting her; to-day a dish of delicious strawberries stood temptingly upon a little side-table. She fastened her habit to a chain at her belt, threw off her hat, and was oblivious in doing so of the splendid mass of hair that had become disarranged and fell over her shoulders down below her waist. Taking the dish of berries in one hand and the bouquet in the other, she went down the winding staircase to the studio.

For an instant she was only the solicitous housekeeper; she glanced about carefully to assure herself of its neatness and order, and to see whether the curtains were arranged just as Hanna said he loved to have them.

He had particularly commended his work-room to his correspondent's care, and she had guarded it as a sacred trust. Every trace of the damage a vengeful hand had wrought was long since erased. The fountains played their cooling, refreshing music in the conservatory, the palms had developed to threatening proportions, that looked dangerous for the glass roof, and many a bud among the rich foliage of the plants held its head to the light with a crimson blush in early bloom. Mercedes moved a stand near the easel, and placed the dish of berries thereon, then filled a Venetian vase with water and set it beside the dish. With timid hesitation she took from her pocket a small unassuming case.

She touched the spring, and gazed a moment upon the portrait of a girlish face with its melancholy proud eyes; then with a smile she buried it in the very heart of the bouquet, and it lay hidden under trembling grasses that were not conscious that they trailed softly over the sweet confession—a woman's entire change of heart.

The pretty arrangement was a perfect success. Her eyes beamed with satisfaction as she surveyed the little table; then she turned their glance about the room once more, and busied herself in rearranging matters merely for pastime. In drawing one of the panther rugs a little closer to a cozy arm-chair, the hair that had become loosened fell over her bosom.

She lifted her arms to fasten it up.

"My sweet one, my darling, how you delight me!" resounded in rapturous tones through the studio.

She started up with a cry, but she felt herself clasped in a passionate embrace, and a sun-brown, deeply expressive countenance, with a pair of glowing blue eyes, gazed entranced into her own.

With an irresistible impulse she cast her arms about his neck, and permitted him to cover her face with kisses, but the

next moment she strove to escape, and poutingly remarked: "Wicked man! this is an unpardonable advantage you have taken—in a moment of surprise—"

"What, Mercedes, in a moment of surprise?" he asked, tenderly, and without releasing her. "Has a moment of surprise made you mine?" He laughed merrily, and the walls re-echoed the sound with a joyous ring. "Darling, do you seriously want me to express in fond words that which we have read between the lines of our letters for so long?"

"Indeed not. I know that you love me, dearly and truly, and with all your honest, loyal German heart," she replied, with tender solemnity, and the flashing eyes grew shy with the affection that makes woman so unspeakably attractive in her submissive love.

"Mercedes!" he whispered, drawing her into the full light from the studio window, "let me look at you. This is not the same Mercedes who once inspired both passion and aversion with her native duality of angel and fiend—who said such wicked things with such annihilating looks—"

"Hush, hush! Do you now comprehend that I acted in self-defense against the conquering, fish-blooded German?" Her face was hidden on his breast in speaking.

"Oh, my poor, poor blinded Madonna!" he exclaimed, looking with roguish dismay at the case where the badly treated Madonna had been locked away. "Those eyes were beautiful after all."

Mercedes looked up in surprise.

"Yes, the eyes were yours, Mercedes, taken from the little portrait." She glanced covertly at her bouquet. "Oh, I know where to find my property!" he laughed. "I saw you pick the flowers; I was hidden behind the Japanese screen yonder when you came in, and only feared the violent beating of my heart would betray me. I noticed how pityingly you smiled at the thirteen-year-old girl, but you will see those same girlish, earnest eyes in some of my best pictures; she appeared there against my own volition. Then you came in person, and like some satanella entered my soul; I hated the eyes that were all flame, and yet so freezingly repellant even while worshiped. In a moment of incomprehensible wrath I blotted out the mocking sphinx that vexed my being. Rapturous change! A tender woman now, and she is mine, my very own; but Mercedes, will you be so in all things?" With a deep-drawn sigh he released her from his arms, and added: "There is something yet unsaid which must be spoken. You, Mercedes, live in an enchanted castle, and float in a life of fairy-like luxury,

and are accustomed to scatter your gold with lavish hands; but fervently as I love you, if in this respect you hope to remain Donna de Valmaseda, it were better to part at once."

"You do not know me," said she, taking his hand. "I will eat only the bread provided by my husband; wear only the garments that are from his hand; and for this I will endeavor to be the worthy mistress of Schillingscourt—a considerate wife. Ask good Birkner, she can tell you that I possess some faculty for making home comfortable. But, Arnold, that is not all to which my woman's heart aspires. I desire to be the artist's companion, with the freedom of your work-room—one with whom you can discuss your ideas and ambitions. When I am the wife of a famous man I want to feel that I may be justly considered his intellectual—"

With a blissful embrace he closed her mouth with kisses.

"Now for a visit to our future home," said he. "I arrived early this morning, and have been delighting myself with a view of the improvements and your appreciative comprehension of my plans."

Walking toward the Column House, under the sycamores that had witnessed so much of joy and sorrow in their time, the happy couple talked about the future, José and Pauly, Mrs. Lucian and Lucille, when Mercedes suddenly exclaimed:

"But we will visit the villa daily, to see grandmamma and the children, when you are ready to throw aside your work. We can walk over toward evening—then you will be my guest."

"To be sure—a frugal supper—"

"Oh, certainly! We will sup out on the terrace, in real economical style. But I have a treasure in my parlor—and it shall always remain there—that will prove more of a magnet to attract you to the villa, after you have seen it, than my pleading, I fancy."

"That admits of a doubt, if you please—"

"No, mark me!"

He laughed heartily, and led her up to the entrance of the Column House. The door flew open as if by magic, and Mamselle Birkner and Hanna met them with solemnly happy faces. Good old Birkner's eyes were overflowing with tears; she wore a handsome new cap that "Arnold"—your pardon—the "master," had fetched her from abroad; but instead of the ceremonious speech of congratulation, so carefully considered, and of which not a word would form on her lips for emotion now, she pointed mutely to the flower-strewn and garlanded corridors.

"My Birkner possesses a Cassandra-like intuition," the baron remarked, roguishly, but still deeply affected. "She knew the hour and the coming of a bride." Then he took the little roly poly woman in his arms and kissed her, as he had done when as a motherless lad she was both nurse and friend to him. Not to the bride's apartments, not to the grand rooms overlooking the terrace, did the baron first conduct his bride. The doors to the portrait-gallery stood wide open; here also the flowers were scattered, at the feet of those square-browed, knightly figures, and the picture of old Baron von Schilling was hung with evergreen.

The son placed his arm around the sweet woman at his side, and led her to the gallant soldierly form that gazed at them with such life-like, glowing eyes, and said: "Here she is, father, Lucian's daughter—'the sacrifice of poor Isaac' has been recompensed a thousand-fold—are you now satisfied?"

The busy stream of humanity without passed up and down, peering through the artistic iron railing to admire again and again the picturesque scene encompassing the magnificent façade of the Column House; but none imagined that at this moment most intricate events and destinies had reached a happy solution at Schillingscourt.

THE END.

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